

AN INQUIRY INTO THE WITHDRAWAL FROM WRITING OF THE MODERN
HEBREW POET AVRAHAM BEN YITZCHAK

אברהם בן יצחק

ד"ר סונה

BY

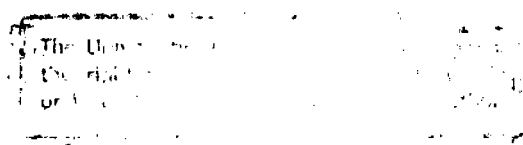
NAOMI JUDITH DISON

HEBREW AND JEWISH STUDIES DEPARTMENT

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

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"A person who does not understand a writer's
silences will not understand his words either."

(Chinese saying)

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WORDS OF APPRECIATION

This thesis is the consummation of the love and dedication of the many special people who have vicariously contributed to the myriad of words and thoughts that have found expression in what is a reverence to Avraham ben Yitzchak.

Firstly, my thanks to my late parents, Millie and Lewis Barris, whose home in which I grew up, was permeated with warmth and affection and traditional Judaism.

Secondly, I pay tribute to my dearly beloved late husband, Lewis Ronald Dison, who was a source of inspiration which never failed, who was constantly at my side, and without whom this thesis would never have found ultimate expression; he opened up the gates of life to me in such a way, that enabled me to enter into my own life, and hopefully find the certainty and fulfilment that he would have liked for me.

Thirdly, I would like to thank all my children including my grandchildren Sarah & Lee, who endured much deprivation of maternal presence during my love affair with Avraham ben Yitzchak.

My very grateful thanks and appreciation go to Dr Azila Talit Reisenberger of the Hebrew Department of the

University of Cape Town who shared in my flirtation with the poet, Avraham ben Yitzchak. It seemed as though fate had conspired to bring our minds together in a labour of love. Dr Reisenberger has put her seal of affection on my work.

Finally, I would like to mention Elana Pessenbacher who lent a touch of the poet to her typewriter, in transmuting sometimes prosaic and illegible material into clear and attractive reality.

ABSTRACT

When one reads Dr Sonne's poetry (Avraham ben Yitzchak, or ABY) from time to time, it strikes one as being the most unique in Hebrew, unlike all other classic poems of his era. Instead of writing about the nationalistic or Zionistic spirit, ABY dealt with the poems in a very personal but objective lyric way, which touches the heart. The nature description is unusual and unique, and the special aura or outlook, the philosophy, something that is not quite Jewish, was a taste of something else (the other, different) and this work contends that on examining this element of distinction, it became most obvious that here was a testimony of Chinese culture that had invested itself into a sensitive philosopher and touched his heart and made an imprint upon him.

In the work there are three sections: the first section deals with biographical notes; the second section deals with an analysis of the poems, Hebrew poems for their own merit, one by one. In the third section, the echoes of eastern or Chinese culture, are picked up and pinpointed and shown to be interwoven into the poetry, first in a hesitant way, and then becoming more and more obvious, stronger and stronger, until the final poem, which is the preparation and explanation that excused ABY to the world, which told why he is not going to write any more. The

author of this work contends that this is the answer for his silence. When one saw such a calibre of writing, one was surprised that after 12 poems, the poet stopped writing. Upon checking it appeared that most of the critics and whoever touched on the subject of ABY, always asked the same question, "why?" - and no-one had the answer. And this is the *raison d'être* of this work, which resulted in an enquiry into the withdrawal from writing of this great poet, after publishing so few poems. He made this decision clearly and in no uncertain terms.

Reading his poems, it became clear and evident that the Chinese influence grew, from poem to poem until ABY made his momentous, seemingly startling decision to withdraw.

ABY told his friend Leah Goldberg that his last two poems were by way of a '131' .

'131' means "renunciation" or "confession". In this case both meanings would be accurate. He confessed to the world what his intentions were and that he was in fact renouncing the lifestyle expected of him by the norms of society thereby renouncing his ego and thus gaining some sort of upliftment for himself.

This renunciation and confession were powerful and poignant, 1) in the giving up of all ambition for the

future, and 2) particularly in the case of a person who was reserved and kept his secrets to himself.¹ It is as if he is disclosing his soul to the public and that is his last act of communication, once only and no more.

1) Canetti, Elias, *Play of the Eyes* p. 140, 141.

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, N.Y. 1986, p. 140, 141.

When I studied at University, I was introduced to two of Dr Avraham ben Yitzchak (Sonne's)¹ poems; and it struck me immediately, seeing them in the context of an anthology of other Hebrew poems, it became so clear that these poems were outstanding, quite different and exceptional to the rules of Hebrew poetry, and when I started looking into it, nobody could explain to me why, and when I tried to read more of his work, it also became difficult, because he never published. This struck me as strange. For a writer not to publish is a contradiction in terms, and when I set out to study him, there were very few light-shedding biographical notes on him: they were short and scarce - as his own writings too, are short and scarce. This then triggered me off into really thinking, "why is it?"

I am interested in philosophies of the world, generally; I am Jewish: I was born Jewish and I am Jewish by conviction, but I have always been open to other cultures, traditions, philosophies, and being aware of the eastern Chinese, it struck me, that there are echoes of this exact thing in ABY's work: then, on checking it out, going from poem to poem, I discovered that the small echoes reverberated and grew, becoming bigger and bigger an influence, and, in fact, "taking over". ABY's Judaism is indisputable, (we can see from his vocabulary, etc.). From my enquiry and

1. ABY

research, the philosophical things became more evident, not just as an echo of Chinese philosophy, but as the reason for his silence, because the more he was absorbed into it, the more he liked it and it became part of him, being in accord with his special nature and temperament, and the fulfilment of this was in reality, for him to go silent.

We do know for certain that ABY was connected with people in London, who were very much "into" the Chinese way of thinking.¹ He visited Chinese galleries there; he was exposed to all cultures. We know for a fact that he started learning Chinese. We are told that with his open mind, he was like a "sponge" to anything and everything.² Furthermore, last but not least, we have Leah Goldberg's (who was his friend) own words of what influenced him as a child, stories and legends with Eastern influence.³ These stories made an impact on him, because he repeated these stories years and decades later. Leah Goldberg devotes four or five pages to the subject of his interest in the Chinese culture, and how he used to spend hours telling her about it, and that the Chinese culture was the salvation of the world. A scholar of Tao in the United Kingdom, having read ABY a number of times,

1) Goldberg, Leah, loc. cit. p. 21, 22, 25.

2) Mann, Y. אורלוגין
8 May 1953 ספרית פועלים, מרחביה
about dragons, etc.

3) Goldberg, Leah, loc. cit. p. 22, 25.

immediately recognized in ABY the make-up of Taoist belief, and is reassuring in asserting that "he certainly has absorbed the spirit of Tao".¹

ABY was afraid of death² - and it can be noticed that in his poems he always tries to find a solution³; his poems often end either in light or silence, or some positive response.

His poems echo the thought and feeling of death, and he tries deperately to assuage his anxiety and anticipated grief.

ABY was attracted to the thrust of Tao, and he needed it. He was a seriously ill man, after a serious accident, and the onslaught of a lung illness from which he suffered for many years. He needed to find some answer to the riddle of life, to make life more bearable.

Doubts kept on recurring; one could not be sure about the "other side."

-
1. J.C. Cooper, private correspondence to the writer of this thesis. 26 June (1991).
 2. His friend, Hermann Broch, wrote very poignantly about the matter of death, to ABY from Yale University, 8.10.47.
 3. Not a cure.

When I came to know ABY, I was taken aback by his lyrics. It struck me that there were mystical and Kabbalistic trends in it, but when I looked into it carefully, I realised it is beyond the bounds of Jewish mysticism - it is obvious that he was influenced by eastern religions, and then, going and studying Tao, the more I learnt about the Tao and its philosophy, the more it became clear to me, that ABY's poetry is, in fact, an echo for this, and his ideas became clearer and clearer. Either the germ of the eastern philosophy was within him, or it came to the fore when he was introduced to it; he related to it as to a kindred brother; as to something he always knew, an immediate relationship.

Nobody knows, he took this secret to his grave, but in my work there is the intention to bring across to the reader, how similar, what close echoes there are, between ABY's poetry and Tao and eastern religions.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

In order to prove my assumption that this exact influence (of eastern philosophy) enabled him to enter the silence and in fact pushed him into it, for people who aren't familiar with this philosophy, there are some relevant, chapters placed in an appendix at the end of this work.

The considerable amount of private correspondence is added to the bibliography and kept at home for safekeeping. It is not offered to the public, being private, having been indulged in from a desire to learn as much as possible about Avraham ben Yitzchak, from writers in Israel about literary aspects, and private family who knew him personally.¹ However, any person who would like to see it for the joy and understanding thereof is welcome.

The poems are analysed in the order of their appearance in the collection of ABY's poetry. Each poem is presented as a ready reference, as there are so few copies of his work available in Hebrew and in English translation. Out of respect to his poetry, each and every poem will be introduced and analysed with the main themes, main metaphors, and so on.

The poems, originally written in Hebrew, will be analysed as such. The English translation, enclosed for the benefit of non-Hebrew speaking people (in the third section of the work), is by I.M. Lask (1957) and is accepted by me, and is to my liking, unless otherwise stated.

In the third part, the echoes of the Chinese in ABY's poetry are shown in a way that the understanding of

1. Or I thought they knew him personally.

the silence will become self evident. First the poem itself is given, then the introduction to the poem, the footnotes are at the end of each page, and the names of books in the bibliography at the end.

The bibliography will be quoted as: name of writer, book or article, publisher and date and page.

This research took 3 years to complete, since much private personal correspondence was gone into, including with some Chinese scholars re-affirming and confirming the ideas behind it, and more was learnt of Chinese thinking and understanding. Since the beginning of 1989, this project has been worked upon, the personal correspondence was copious, ABY's family were difficult to trace in different countries of the world, and various material had to be procured from Israel. This slowed down the process.

Bialik said poetry in translation is "like kissing through a handkerchief".¹ Talking of the theory of literature La Canne said, you can't translate, because a literary piece is a communication, and you can not really perceive anything of the subconscious of the writer; and the essential deepest meaning doesn't come through. Nevertheless, Lask's translations retain the spirit of the poetry.

1. Dr Natas Moshe. Educator, cultural office. Zionist Federation, Johannesburg.

The bibliography is divided into three: 1) the main one which was frequently used; most of it deals with ABY directly, 2) the background bibliography dealing with general studies on Hebrew poetry and theory of literature which broadened my own background knowledge and 3) Tao readings.

A special remark:- the reader will notice that the book of Leah Goldberg, פגישת המשוררים , is used, markedly more often than other sources, for two reasons, 1) because Leah Goldberg was an intellectual critic, she was a poetess, editor and Professor of Comparative Literature: she was considered an authority in Israel on general and Hebrew literature,¹ and 2) she was the only person who was close to ABY.² In my opinion she knew him intimately. And since we understand how important the intellectual capacity is for him, in a companion, she could have been "a kindred soul"

-
1. Ben-Yosef Israel and Skinner Douglas Reid : Contrast Winter 1988 Vol. 6, No. 3. "Approximations" : Translations from Modern Hebrew p. 20.

She was the chair of Hebrew literature at Jerusalem University. She published novels, a play and stories for children, as well as translating into Hebrew from Russian, English, Italian, German and French. Apart from being a writer in her own right, she introduced literature in radio programmes at the university, internationally and in Israel.

2. His friends Canetti and Broch lived in England, and America.

or a person with whom he could discuss serious matters since she was an intellectual in her own right. They were on the same wavelength. She had much in common with him.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I hope the joy of these years of research will come through, because this was much more than a work of study; it was a labour of love.

Lin Yutang said, to understand Emerson's essays, "Over-soul" and "Circles" it is important to understand Tao Te Ching.

To understand ABY it is believed by the writer of this thesis that the same applies.

Therefore at the end of this thesis, on the final page, there will be found a very brief explanation of the terms Tao, Laotse, Chüang Tzu, Tao Te Ching and Yin-Yang.

P A R T I

B I O G R A P H Y

BIOGRAPHY

Dr Avraham (ben Yitzchak) Sonne

13.9.1883 Born at Przemysl, near the Sun River,
tributary of the large Vista River, in
Galicia.

Orphaned young; ABY was the eldest of the
children. His mother had nine more children
after him (by her second husband); brought
up by grandfather; given a traditional
religious and general education.

1908 He was a student of Psychology and
Literature at the University of Vienna, also
Berlin.

1913 - 1914 Lectured at Teachers Training College in
Jerusalem. (During this period he was
seriously injured when his carriage
overturned.)

1914 When the 1st World War broke out, he was in Vienna.

1914 - 1915 Przemyśl was overtaken by the Russians, and all his writings, left at home, were lost. This was a dreadful shock to him, which he never overcame.

He took an active part in Jewish life, and was very keenly interested in politics.

1917 He was sent by Vienna Jewry to represent the Western Council of Austrian Jews, to Copenhagen, where he met Brandeis, and also Bialik.

1919, 1920, He was on the Zionist Executive in London,
1921 and also on the Reorganisation Committee.
He at one time advised Weitzman.

1920 He went to Israel with the Reorganization Committee.

1922 He made his home in Vienna. He gave up active part in politics permanently and became a teacher, later principal, of the Hebrew Teacher's College founded by Zvi Chajes.

1938 The Nazis occupied Austria, and Avraham ben Yitzchak left Vienna, and immigrated to Israel. He lived in Jerusalem.

He had been ill a long time;

1949 His condition worsened.

1950 He died at Ramatayim Hospital.

20th May

Buried in Tel Aviv, in the Nahalat Yitzchak cemetery.

Avraham ben Yitzchak wrote poetry as a child.

He was never keen to publish. Whatever of his poetry was published was before the First World War.

After that he imposed literary silence upon himself; wrote a few anonymous articles.

Some private fragments of his were found later.

ABY'S PERSONAL MAKE-UP

ABY was a remarkable man, quite unique, and different from all other people. From what has been gleaned from different opinions, as will be shown in this thesis, "we know he was "streets and light years" away from the average person, dissimilar in every respect.

We are told he was a genius; we are told he was well informed in all subjects; we are told he was charismatic, and yet, we know he had social difficulties. He was not a good "mixer": he could communicate the best with highly intellectual people, such as Buber, James Joyce, Popper, Lynkaeus, many of the greatest writers; he could also communicate with simple folk, who intrigued him, and children, whom he loved.

We are told he liked to help people; sadly he had no one of his own to help: his life was a lone one, for the most part, from beginning to end.

It is true, he had a great friend in Leah Goldberg, whom he saw frequently in Israel (1938-1950), but, he unfortunately set up a barrier between himself and all people (as Leah

Goldberg herself says).¹

There was something in him that did not allow him to give of himself, and because of this he suffered from alienation - and alienation can only mean one thing - alienation from one's self.

ABY was a star in the sky, (of which he wrote so much, being a lover of nature and the universe of which he was a part) - a lone star.

1.

בדברים האלה ביקש להגיד לי שגם אני הייתי
בחייו, וכי לא היה אומר לי דבר זה לעולם...
היה מקבל את פני בתומרה, שומר על השרהק בינינו.

Goldberg, Leah, p. 56, loc. cit. פגישה עם משורר

Vera Levin also wrote:

וכן היה חרות בזכרונות: מאחורי הדלת השקופה, אך הסגורה,
וצלו מסתמן מן הזכוכית.

15:6:55

לויין ורה, אברהם בן יצחק, הארץ,

THE STATURE OF THE POET IN THE EYES OF THE MODERN LITERARY
WORLD

ABY is acclaimed today as a unique poet; by some critics he is even considered as a major poet.¹

Bialik wrote to ABY, who was then 26, in 1909:-

שלח שירים חדשים. ברכה רבה בך. רואה אני בשירים

את הסינתיזה של השירה הנבואית והמודרנית (פניני שירים היהודים בימינו).

(Ungerfeld 3.7.70, על המשמר,)

Bialik saw him as a visionary and a poet, an ascetic

ביאליק הצביע על אבי כעל היוצר הראשון שהטעימו מן

הטעם של הגלגל החדש בשירה העברית.²

1. Hakak Lev, Hever Hanan.

2. Dr H. Hever, ראשי תיבות השגה p. 411.

Bialik wished to publish an anthology of his poems, and also articles of literary criticism.¹

As Leah Goldberg said

אולי היה הוא המשורר היחיד שחי את שירתו הלכה למעשה.²

The critic Benzion Benshalom, named him "the herald of a new epoch".³

In the words of Nathan Zach,

שירתו נטועה בקרקע שירה אחרת. דבר זה אין בבוהו לגרוע
מן הוראות שאכן היה בשירה אינדיבידואליסטית מובהקת כזאת
מסופ חדש.⁴

1. בבואו לארץ היה במיטב עלומיו, ולהוציא מתחת ידו שיר
היה כבר אז קשה בקריעת ים סוף.
פיכמן יעקב, דבר, קטעי שירה ופרוזה, 12.1.51.

2. Goldberg Leah

פגישה עם משורר, הקיבוץ הארצי השומר הצעיר, מרחביה
p. 6. 1952

3. The Poetry of Avraham ben Yitzchak : Zionist
Organization, Youth and Hehalutz Dept, Jerusalem,
1957, p. 40.

4. He talks of גלוי יוצא דופן, and שירה אחרת
על מה שאין בה He says it is easier to characterize it
זך נתן, לפני שער עם נעילה, דבר, 11.8.50

Zach refers to the phenomenon of newness which applied to the entire treatment of ABY's creative work and emphasizes that he imparted a message of cosmic union, and of a deeper insight into the mysteries of nature.

Yitzchak Mann, after bestowing approbation and showering accolades, attributes to the poet

על הכל משהו לא - הדע - הגדר משל אוניברסליות בלבד עברי.

Yitzchak Mann also says that ABY had the gift of expressing what others thought in a more elevated and lucid and charismatic style. He had his own particular brand of knowledge.¹

Aharon bar-Shmuel described him as a poet בחסד עליון

מבשרי החדש - אולי המבשר הראשון בה"א הידיעה.²
as

1) Mann Y.

אורלוביץ, ספרית פועלים, מרחביה, 8.5.55, עמ' 116

2) 2/6/50 בסבילי הפנתיאון, על המשמר,

Dr Lev Hakak, described ABY's writing as spectacular and described ABY as a miraculous stylist who combined unity of form with content of the deepest calibre hitherto unexpressed in Hebrew.¹

New interest has been shown in this poet recently by a number of translations that have been published.² Also, there was in 1989 a radio broadcast in Israel, lasting an hour, on ABY in which writers and critics expressed their appraisal.³

Leah Goldberg says it is necessary in describing him,

למסור אותו אמת אובייקטיבית אשר היתה בו, בכל הופעתו, במחשבתו
ובתגובותיו, והרי היא המציית של דור, המציית תקופה והאצלתה
באישיות אחת.⁴

-
1. Hakak Lev
Tel-Aviv 1979 עם ארבעה משוררים, עקד,
 2. Transcriptions/Inscriptions (State University of New York 1979).
 3. Other participants were Ada Zemach, Lifschitz; a pupil of ABY's Jeroham Tolkes, Idit Knoller, the programme having been arranged by Hanan Mitler, Rachel Maran and Hanan Hever.
 4. Leah Goldberg : פגישה עם משורר loc. cit.
1952

As was brought out in the recent broadcast by Dr. Hever, ABY conceived his poems on a large scale; his themes were not petty or small, but great, leading to his increased recognition as a major poet.¹

1) Radio Tape, Kol Yisrael organized by Hever, Maran & Mitler, תש"ט, 1989.

PART 2

ANALYSIS OF THE POEMS

ANALYSIS OF THE POEMS

POEM 1

הָהָרִים שֶׁחֲבָרוּ מִסְבִּיב לְעִירִי

WRITTEN: Summer/Autumn 1902

הָהָרִים שֶׁחֲבָרוּ מִסְבִּיב לְעִירִי
צִפּוֹן הַסּוּד בִּיעֲרוּתֵיהֶם
מִמַּעַל לוֹ רָעַשׁ יָם אֵילָנוֹת
וּבְחִבּוֹן צֶלֶם צִפּוֹן הַסּוּד.

וַיָּבֹא הַבָּצִיר
וְהוֹב וְאֶבֶיר
וַיִּזְרֶה אֶת אוֹרוֹ מִסְבִּיב -
כָּל הַמְשָׁעוּלִים הָאִירוּ
הִנֵּה הַבְּהִיר גַּם הִיעָר
שָׁקֵט הוּא וְשִׁגִּיאוֹ
וְרֹאשׁוֹ בִּשְׁמַיִם
וְעַל סוּדוֹ
נָח הָאוֹר.

In this poem the unmanifest underlies the manifest.
The secret is under what is seen. The secret underlies
everything. The autumn here represents the autumnal cycle
in the human life span.¹

1.

ככל אשר חגול הפריהה כן חגול גם הקמילה סאתריה.
גולדברג לאה, פניסה עם משורר, ספרית פועלים, הוצאת הקיבוץ הארצי השומר
See note 1 on the following page. הצעיר, 1952, עמ' 14

In this poem we have the vintage theme (the golden autumn theme). These are European pictures. Israel does not have autumn. Only summer and winter. In Europe there is the long season; the leaves turn orange. (In this poem we have the opposition of the ripeness associated with the autumn because the ripeness is rich and full and at its peak, but also dying.) In this poem material is transposed into light, a vivifying power of strong creative energy: darkness turning into light. The images of fruition, of vintage, of autumn could be seen as artistic transformation from raw experience into artistic fullness. It could also be the beginning of withering away.¹ ABY identified with moving non-static nature in the universe conveying its flux and rhythm in his poetry: Nature or the world for him is not something solid but is in constant motion. It gives one a feeling of insecurity. Nature changes but is everlasting, man fades out.

The secret has height and depth, high up in the sky and rooted and anchored. It is profound. It is a firm secret and the light cannot uncover it in its hiding-place. It merely comes to rest on the secret. The secret remains a mystery, hidden in the hiding place of the shade of the trees. Then there is a dramatic change. The vintage comes and sheds its light around it, hence there are splashes

1.

נוף שובע המכמיש בתוך השובע שלו

הבר חנן, ראשיתו השגה, עם '407.

of colour. The paths in the forest do not light up of their own accord. They are lit up, one after the other. The secret remains calm and lofty. Even the paths which show the way cannot show the way to the secret. Nature is lit up but the human secret remains. The "אנ-הנשר" keeps the secret to himself, his personal holy of holies. Perhaps the secret is not even accessible to himself. Perhaps he himself doesn't know - but it is not heavy and dark anymore. It is not revealed yet, but we know for sure that he does not feel so bad about it any more.

Nathan Zach says that ABY describes his nature poems with careful opposites.¹

The light in the second verse changes the shade of the first verse. It takes place in the little spaces which the shade has left. There is a real intermingling of light and shade. This is a characteristic of impressionistic poetry.

In this poem there is a metaphysical basis. It deals with a unique secret and not with a personal problem.

1. את האורי הסבע שלו הוא מרכז לעתים סביב נגודים זהירים.

לפני שער עם נעילה, זכר, 11.6.60.

Will we ever know? Is it a secret of life? The unexpected? The unknown? This talks of a metaphysical dilemma which we don't know.

This poem **ההריט שהוברו מסביב לעירי** is permeated with secret. Each word is charged with it. The secret is hidden, deep down, guarded and protected by the band of immovable mountains, the forests, the restless sea of trees, and the secret places of the shade.

Nature is real, but not the real thing. It is the secret lying behind it which is real. It is a close-locked, sublime, enrapturing, mystified secret.

The secret cannot be seen, but it can be felt. There is agitation, throbbing, a noisy "sea of trees", high above, out of reach, which covers it up. This invisible secret could be a new chapter in the life of **האני השר**. It causes him discomposure and disquietens him.

The secret is **צפון הנהר**

And then, something happens. There is something new - the opposite. Everything becomes lit up!

**וְיָבֹא הַבְּצִיר
וְהָיָה רֶאֱבִיר
וְיִזְרְחֶה אֶת אֹרֹךְ מַסְבִּיב -**

Not only the paths, also the trees become alight! After the eeriness of the dark, it is calm; after the eeriness, all is uplifted.

כָּל הַמַּשְׁעוּלִים הֵאִירוּ.
הִנֵּה הַבְּהִיר גַּם הַיָּעַר

The forest is calm and noble and lofty, (שָׁקֵט הוּא וְשׁוֹבֵה)
it is mighty and sublime. There is contact between the forest, the mountains, the sky and the sea.

The forest has its head in the mountains, up in the heavens.
וְרֹאשׁוֹ בַּשָּׁמַיִם

On its secret rested the light.
וְעַל סוֹדוֹ
נָח הָאוֹר

Now it is not a dark secret. It is not a painful, distressing secret anymore; it is now acceptable. There is something beautiful about it. He doesn't have to hide it anymore. It has now become illuminated.

There are two possibilities - perhaps the poet is talking about someone who is carrying a heavy secret, weighing on his heart. When it becomes lighter, it lightens him. And on a higher level it can be the soul which is hidden within the body, a burden of flesh and blood. And only with the discarding of the physical, one reaches the real beautiful secret of within.

PARADOXES IN HEHARIM SHECHOOBRU MISAVIV L'IRI

In ההרים שחברו מסביב לעירי the mountains are high up and
the city is low down; the secret is hidden (and quiet) in
the forest and above it is the "noisy sea of trees". The
trees are high and the sea is profoundly deep.

As against the "noisy sea of trees", we have the silent
secret hidden in the hiding place of their shade.

The secret is hidden in the darkness of the forest; then
the vintage comes with its light cycle.

The paths are lit up: the forest, which before, had a
"noise of the sea of trees" above it, is now "tranquil and
lofty" (with its "head in the skies") (sea ≠ skies).

ועל סודו

נח האור

The key words would be the opposites:

סוד ≠ רעש

צפון ≠ ויזרה... מסביב

צל ≠ אור, האידו, תבחר

These are the key words to the mood and meaning. These opposites
strengthen and confirm the polarity in the poet's state of mind.

POEM 2

אלול בשדרה

WRITTEN IN AUTUMN 1902 (The poet was 17 years old)

אורות חולמים
אורות חורים
לרגלי צונחים.
צללים רכים
צללים נלאים
את שבילי ילמפו.

מבין פארות השוכות
רוח קלה
תתן קול
והם.
הנה עלה אחרון
יעוף למטה
רגע יחרד עוד
ודממה.

THEME

אלול בשדרה, a gentle poem, could be called "Evanescence" or "Fleetingness". It is dreamy and light. ABY told Leah Goldberg that אלול בשדרה is a description of the park in his city.¹

The שֶׁיָּרֵךְ could be an avenue that comes to an end, or it could be an avenue that has no end, that goes on infinitely, to we know not where, like the path in Leonardo da

1. loc. cit. p. 63

Vinci's Mona Lisa; it goes on. If he talked about a park, when reality passed through his consciousness, a big space, like a park immediately came into linear direction in his mind - a **שדרה**. Not only this, but it is a **שדרה** of trees, and trees are taller than human beings, and while walking it, you have the feeling that he is between two walls, like the mountains that surround his city. He constantly shows a feeling that he knows that he is restricted and restrained.¹

There is also a restrained beauty in the refined lights and shades paving the way.

There are royal nuances hinted at in the poem.

In the **שדרה** under the trees, the shadows only come to the footsteps of the **אני-השר**. There is no touching; it is almost regal: you can't touch royalty. It is almost like a dream. There is **רוח קלה / קול / נהם**, gentle wind. This gentleness is also

1. Mann, Yitzchak. He is a restrained person.

שלו ושקט, מסוגר ומחבוד.

אורלוגין, ספרית פועלים, מרחביה, 8 במאי 1955, עמ' 114.

part of his upbringing, his nobility.

אורות חולמים
אורות חורים
לרגלי צונחים
צללים רכים
צללים נלאים
את שבילי ילספך

Here, there is not only autumn,¹ א ל ל , but also gentle weary shadows, eventime, twilight, autumn and twilight, all signifying an approach to the end of the road of life even though the poet was only 17 when he wrote this.

The last leaf fluttering down from the bare boughs gives an indication of "leading to the end".² He doesn't talk about the night. There is neither sunshine, rainbows, colours, hopes and aspirations, nor black and white. The colours are pale and greyish.

It is constantly at the back of his mind, the path of life leading somewhere, to the end "of the evening".

המה עלה צהרון
לענף למטה
רגע יחדיו עוד
נדמנה

1. This is not in Israel.

2. Strange for a young gentleman, knowing he goes towards it.

Light becomes silence.¹

Everything about this poem is gentle, the dreamy lights,

the אורות חורקים, אורות חולמים, the צללים,

the רוח קלה,

the pale lights, the shadows, the gentle breeze, the sounds, and the last leaf fluttering down.

ABY deals with the problem of "autumn" and "twilight" leading to the almost end, all his life, starting from early youth. It is sad, because it is constantly at the back of his mind, that he is leading, towards the end of the evening.²

The preoccupation with death and finality is the underlying theme running through his poetry. It is most unusual for a young poet, which he was at the time.

1. Dr Hever says "Silence starts here".
p. 433 ראשיתו חשבה,

2. כך מוצא זמורה על בן יצחק:
שהעצם בשירי בן יצחק אינו חולשה אלא היפוכה, וששירה כזאת מצוינת
בייחוד אופי ובייחוד כוח !
חקק לב, עם ארבעה משוררים, עקד, הל אביב, 1979, עמ' 28.

POEM 3

לא ידעתי נפשי

WRITTEN IN VIENNA IN 1909

ימי הבציר והשמים רבי התנועה האלה
עת תקרין הארץ את אורה מתוכה
ועבים שחופים ורחבי הפנפים
נגרפים למרחקים בסערה -
וחור אז משנה חורון ביתה הבוהר
מתוך ירקרק שחור היער
וקרא לי אז בחלונותיו:
בלבי סתרה
מפני הסערה.

וכשתישבי כה לפני האח
ופיו זהבו
על ראשה הערמוני הזה והנמו
יזל האור באצבעותיה
ובראי שחור שמלת משיה
ירקד זהר השלהבת.
ילחמו בדממה פנוחים מעל שלחנה
עתרת ענבי הפתם תעבור את שפת המנא
ונתנה הברכה את ריחה הרזה.

ירעם את ירעש היער
ומתוך שירו
מתוך דממת
פנת יקרתה.

אָנְכִי וְאַתָּה -
מִמַּעַל לָנוּ
שְׁאוֹן יָמִים.
אָנוּ חֲבוּיִים
בְּנִשְׁתֵּי פְּנִינִים
בְּחוּץ רִקְמָתוֹ
עַל קֶרֶקַע הַיָּם.

לֹא יִדְעָתִי נִפְשִׁי
וְנִפְשִׁי רוּחָהּ אֶת הַדְּמָמָה.
רְאִי: בְּנִפְי רוּחִי יִרְטָטוּ.
יִרְעֵם אֶת יִרְעֵשׁ הַיַּעַר
יִכָּה מִשְׁבָּרָיו הָרוּחַ
וַיֵּמָּה מִבְּמִתָּה הָרוּעֵד עָלֵי יָנוּחַ.
אֶת הַבְּרָכָה
אֶת הַמְּנוּחָה -
וּלְקִרְאָת נִפְשִׁי הַסְּעָרָה צְנוּחָה.
שִׁמְעֵי: שְׁאוֹן מִשְׁבָּרִים אֲבִירִים בִּנְעֹר
נִזְעָקָה הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוּאָה.
אֶת כָּל נִפְשׁוֹ הָעוֹלָם הָעֶרְה
לְקִרְאָת אֲדָנִי בַּסְּעָרָה.

The pivot of the poem, its essence, is built on opposites, viz. the storm outside, and the quiet within and the two lovers. The inner silence is described as a woman but "inside" could infer soul. At the end he talks of his soul being influenced.

What influenced his soul? the love for the woman or perhaps "the woman" is his soul? G-d could be the divine spirit in him, the spirit of might, masculine, and the Shechina, the loving female, compassionate lovingness of G-d's essence.

He sees himself as his own being, as the physical, the doer, the worker, the intellect, the male picture, the outside, but the inside is the woman, or soul. It is difficult to decide whether this is a love description, because it is unusual for ABY to give strong love descriptions. Certain things he said to the woman, "you are blessing, you are all rest", but he refers to his soul as well, as being quiet, so perhaps he isn't talking about a woman, but is talking about the feminine part of his being, viz his soul.

The idea of - $\text{BNI } \text{DIN}$ gives the idea more strength, the stormy world is outside and the two "lovers" (or lovers) are tied together like two pearls tucked away safely in the ocean bed. Their togetherness insulates them and protects them and strengthens them.

However, this could be a poem where he describes woman's love, and the beauty of woman's love.

They have to be read together, because the soul and the woman are so closely juxtaposed.

For instance, the apples burning יִלְהוֹטוּ בְדֹמָם תְּפֹהִיִּם ,
might be her breasts, ripe for the plucking.

The ripe grapes are overflowing the basket, signifying that she is ripe and overflowing; with her warmth she is ready to be plucked and he is ready to grab her. So, the bowl of fragrant succulent fruit on the table, ripe and ready, is describing her, perfumed, luscious and voluptuous,¹ feminine; - as in Hebrew, the word "neshama" - "soul", is a feminine form.

He keeps on saying לֹא יָדַעְתִּי נֶפֶשׁ . This is the title
and then we have it in the third last verse.²

To know, in ancient Hebrew means to have intercourse, but he never actually took her in the end. He did not know her. She was virtually untouched by him. She was sitting there quietly. "My soul soaked in the silence."

לֹא יָדַעְתִּי נֶפֶשׁ
וְנֶפֶשׁ רִוְחָה אֶת הַחַמָּה.
רָאִי: כּוֹפֵי רִוְחֵי יִרְשָׁנוּ.

-
1. It could actually be two parts of the soul, and it is sad, because the part of the soul that is locked in, has its yearnings, and never has outlet.
 2. This phraseology, and the lush description of woman's love occurs most frequently in שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים .

"See! The wings of my soul quiver. "Why is it? perhaps he is in love with her.

קָרַעַם אֶת קִרְעוֹ הַיָּעַר

The storm of the forest is outside.

יָמָה מִשְׁפָּרִיז הָרוּחַ

The wind is roaring:

Your trembling gaze rests on me

וַיֵּמָה מִבְּשָׁר הָרוּעֵד עָלַי זָנוּת

As in ל כ ה ז ו ר י , with the queen of the Sabbath, she is the queen part of G-d, the soft part.

"Aye, you are blessing,

You are all rest,

When at my very soul the tempest shrieked.

The storm is beating on my soul."

אֶת הַבְּרָכָה

אֶת הַמְּנוּחָה -

וְלִשְׂרָאֵל נִפְשֵׁי הַסְּעָרָה צוּחָה

The whole world is pouring out its soul to G-d, in readiness before the L--d.

אֶת כָּל נִפְשׁוֹ הָעוֹלָם הוֹעִיָּה

לִשְׂרָאֵל אֲדוֹנֵי בְּטֻעָה

הָעוֹרָה could have an erotic connotation; it could be one soul, or the collective soul of our world, knocking at G-d's gate, giving of ourselves to G-d, who is greater than any human being.

There is storm outside. Perhaps it is better to go into the silence of the soul where the feminine part is, and to try and find peace there.¹

-
1. "Reflect, consider, remember.
Resort to introversion,
But one step more
And thou art free."
("Besinne dich doch
Nur einen schritt
Sobist du Frei.")
(Sayer, P.J. Eastern Wisdom and Western Thought, Allen & Unwin, London, 1969, quoting Goethe's Faust, p. 41.)
Goethe regarded this experience of spiritual yearning as decisive.

The L--d appears out of the whirlwind. Job 38-42:6
(This is a drama of the human soul.)

POEM 4

WRITTEN IN VENICE IN 1910 (The poet was then twenty seven years old)

מלכות

היום ידעה בעמרת
יכביר הזהב על מצחי
שולי מעילי ושמפו על פני מעלות השיש
מה יהמה הים בפאר יגון הערב.

פת לילה, שקמי לבוא
שבי לרגלי על לבנת השיש
ישא הרוח שערה
ושערה הן שחור.
הנה גאו המים -
שבי שקמה
עד אמר: קומי רני!

In the poem, מ ל כ ו ת , written in Venice, in 1910, when he was twenty seven years old, he writes about a royalty that could be his own as a creative artist, not in terms of his own ego in a narrow sense, but the mature artist, perhaps a form of royalty of the soul.

The royalty of the palaces is diminishing, water is sweeping everywhere, the grand power of Nature is evident and there is a taking over of the historical past by the waters of the present, by the simple and non-aristocratic present.

Venice is sinking, and all is becoming lost.

The "royal" artist is trying to control the pace of decadence, the decay and chaos, and to regain the royalty of the past.

The colours play an important role in the poem; the gold of the sunset blends with the gold of the crown, as against the gleaming white of the marble.

In the second verse the white of the marble accentuates the blackness of the night. The blackness of the water as reflected by the night, and fear, engulfs all this exquisite waning beauty.

The day is dying and everything is heavy and ponderous.

הַ לַיְלָה - הַ לַיְלָה¹ could be the "Bride of the Sea" which is another name for Venice.

הַ לַיְלָה - הַ לַיְלָה could also be the Romantic female muse figure;² הַ לַיְלָה - הַ לַיְלָה could be the profound female, the Mother of all things, from which all things emanate and from which light emerges - the "dark mystic void" of the Kabbalah. There could be a Kabbalistic influence in this poem since the concept of royalty coincides with other

1. See Alkalay Dictionary.

2. In Romantic poetry, the feminine beauty is often portrayed as a young woman - "anima" - the muse referred to above. Cf. Ode on Grecian Urn by Keats, where the Urn represents the womb (or the imagination).

Kabbalistic ideas.¹

The royal theme of the נסיך מעוט ² with its image of the quiet voice heard in royalty, is suitable to that which is described, calm, dignified, tranquil.

The poet is speaking impersonally. Nevertheless, at the same time, there is a feeling of unspeakable "angst" underlying the poem. We have the evening mood:

We note the human nature of the sea. We note the construction of the expression בפאר יגור הערב.

Once there is evening we automatically look to the evening of the life cycle.⁴

One of the poet's obsessions is death, and it was impressed upon him urgently, so we need not worry that he was only twenty seven at the time of writing. The poem does have the mood of an old man - one of these intangible things, as if an old man wrote it.

1. For example, כתר, the first of the ten emanations. See 'Dan Joseph : Gershom Scholem, N.Y. Univ. Press, N.Y. 1987, p. 135, 8.

2. See Zach Nathan
2nd column 11/1/60 זכר, לפני שער עם נעילה,

3. פאר and הערב are divided by sorrow.

4. The word הערב is written in the Pausal form - final and conclusive."

ABY's young woman seems to dissolve his fear, but then refocusses it. The sense of royalty is held in contrast as against the angst of death, and there is a certain amount of creative energy arising from this contrast.

He finds a fleeting shelter from overshadowing dread in beauty.

POEM 5

לילות כי ילבינו

DATE WRITTEN: 1912

בְּאַלֶּה לַיְלֵי הַחֲלוֹם הַלְבָּנִים
שֶׁיִּחְלֹם עוֹלָם עֲנִי
יִדְם יִקְשִׁיב הַזֶּמֶן אֶל דְּפָקוֹ
בְּהֶרְנִין מַעֲנִנֹת
רֶנַח עֲצֻמוֹתָם.

וְעֶבֶר וְעֵתִיד יִשְׁתַּלְמֻ
שִׁלּוֹת נִצָּחִים בְּהוּוּה.
בְּדוֹמִיַת חַיִּיה
יִשְׁקֻמוּ כּוֹכָבִים
וְרוּחַ מִנְצָחִים תִּפְכֶּה -
עֵינֶיהָ תִּרְחֹבְנָה.

The poem deals with a moment. It is like a slow motion when all else dissolves and the moment is "eternal". This is a moment of unique revelation.

This is a reflective poem, in which the mind is quiet, but aware - the still part of the turning world, the unmoved mover. It is short, contemplative and transcendental.

It is still and calm. In the title, we have a dichotomy, in the meaning of the words, (when nights are white); nights could only be black.

The poem is built on such paradoxes, for instance

שִׁתְּהָלוֹס עוֹלָם עֵינַי

When dreams are dreamt, it is time for rest, not to be weary. Here the world is weary. In the third line, time will be silent, and yet it hears its own pulse ... (In the silence, we can hear and appraise ourselves.)

יָדָם יִקְשִׁיב הַזֶּמֶן אֶל דַּפְקוֹ
בְּחֶרְנִין מְעִינֹת
רֶנַח עֲצֻמוֹתָם

In the silence we can hear and find the regenerating source of what is inside of us, the ever-renewing fountains of Self.

"For with Thee is the fountain of life; In Thy light do we see light").¹

Time grows still but the fountains sound and sing.

וְעָבַר וְעָתִיד יִשְׁתַּלְמֹד

Past and future come to terms, the past has gone, tomorrow never comes. There is only "now".

שְׁלוֹת נְצֻחִים בְּהוֹה.

1. Ps. 36:10. Also quoted in meditation before kindling the Sabbath lights.

"While present is tranquil eternities."

There is a timelessness in "the present" - it goes on for ever.

בְּדוֹמָמַת חַיִּים
יִשְׁקֹטוּ כּוֹכָבִים
וְרוּחַ מְנוּחָיִם תִּפְכֶּה -

This is a time of dream, but while you are dreaming in the silent moment of your life, great things are happening to you, and although you are dreaming your eyes grow wide.

In the final line the reader is asked to "widen the eyes" in awe.

עֵינֶיךָ הִרְחִיבָה

There is a huge energy created here. The last two lines convey the sudden perception of the essential nature of Time.

This poem speaks of דּוֹמָמַת חַיִּים . ABY yearned for stillness. Mostly his poems turn the face of stillness towards us.

POEM 6

1

חורף בהיר

WRITTEN IN 1902

מָהוֹר וְקִנְיָה וְלֶבֶן הָעוֹלָם.
מִצְפוֹן הָרוּחַ תָּמוּל הַנִּיסָה
חֲלוּמוֹת עֶרְפֶּל
עוֹר וְחוּעָה
עַד בְּלִי קֶץ -
בְּנִשְׁמָתָהּ תַעֲצוֹר הַיּוֹם הָרוּחַ.
שֶׁלֶג מְבַהִיק מְסָבִיב
וְצֵל הָרִים תָּכוֹל
נְשָׁמִי תִכְלֹת חוֹרִים
יִרְמָטוּ בְּאוֹרָם.
וּבִצֵּל -
תְּפוּשׁ בַּהֲדָר קִפְאוֹנוֹ
יִשְׁתַּרֵּעַ הַנֶּהָר
בְּרִקְתָּ קֶרַח כִּהָה
וְשִׁלְגִי זֶהָר לוֹ
עַד אֲשֶׁר יֵאבֵד שְׁבִילוֹ
הִירְקָרֵק וְהַמִּתְפַּתֵּל
שֶׁם בְּמִרְחָק.
מְקוֹם שֶׁם אוֹר הַיּוֹם הִתְלַקַּח
וְנִגַּה לוֹ לֶבֶן-לְהַבּוֹת
כְּאֵלּוֹ חֲמָה נִפְלָה
עַל גְּלָמֵי קֶרַח
קִשֵּׁי הַבְּדוּלָח -
וְתִשְׁבֵּר.

1. In order to avoid repetition, the reader of this thesis is referred to Poem 6, חורף בהיר (BRIGHT WINTER) p. 123

את עיני אס גרה.
בי ירון דמי
וצלילו באוני:
מהור העולם.

לי נדמה:
יחד עם לב הארץ
בי לבי יהלום
והוא עם פלגים ירום
שמתחת לגלד הקרח נוזלים.

מהור העולם.
מהור.

נדפס ב"השלוח" מס י"ט-19

THEME

The poem depicts an exquisite impressionistic winter landscape, in a duality of "realistic" and "abstract".

All the way through it could be either/or - either realistic, or abstract, or interchangeable, i.e. the descriptions could be interpreted figuratively or literally which add to the beauty of the poem and its meaning:

Ultimately, there is a revelation, that there is an intimate connection between the realistic and the abstract¹ as there is between man and the world, all is one.

-
1. This poem was written in 1902, and it is possible that ABY read Bialik's *שירי חורף*, about 2 months before, in "Hashiloah." The influence is confirmed, because ABY's heading is *חורף בקיר*, and in Bialik's winter poetry, the word *ב קיר* is also used. Bialik wrote *הוא בקיר, גֶּזֶר וְבוֹטָח*; ABY used the term in a modern way, as it had not been used before. He drew from it, and recreated it in an innovative way.

ABY originally wrote *בְּהִיר וּמִנְצֵץ הָעוֹלָם*

and then he changed it to *טְהוֹר וְקֶסֶם וְלִבֵּן הָעוֹלָם*

POEM 7

1

WRITTEN 1912

מזמור

לְרַגְעִים מְאֹד מְעַצִּים יֵשׁ אִשָּׁר תִּשָּׂא
בָּהּ אֶת נַפְשָׁהּ כְּאַגֵּל הַבְּדוּלַח:
עוֹלָם מְלֵא מִשְׁמֵשׁוֹ וְשִׁבּוּר-בְּוִנִים
כְּנֶסֶת מִרְאוֹת וּדְבָרִים רוֹעֲדִים
וְעֵינֶיהָ לְעוֹלָמָהּ
כְּאֵל אֵגֶל הַבְּדוּלַח.
וְאוֹלָם עוֹלָמָהּ הֵן יַחֲרֵד לְהִשְׁתַּפֵּף
וּבְמִלּוֹאוֹ לֹא יַעֲמֹד
וְיַחֲרֵד אֶל כָּל אַפְסִים.
וְהֵן לְכָל הָעוֹלָמִים אֶתָּה נָתַן
כְּצוּר מִרְחֻקִּים אֲוִרִירִים מְעִינֶיהָ יִנְהָר
וּבְעֹנֵתִי מִחֲשָׁבִים בָּהֶן יִתְעַמְקוּ
וּמִצְאוֹהֶם הַדְּבָרִים הָרְחוּקִים וְהַקְּרוֹבִים -
וְדַרְשׁוּ נַפְשָׁהּ.

בְּדָמֵי הַלִּילּוֹת
תַּעֲמֹד בְּרֹאשׁ הָרִים
וְאֵל בֵּין כּוֹכָבִים קָרִים וּגְדוּלִים תִּשִּׂים רֹאשָׁהּ.
וְשִׁקְעוּ לְאָרֶץ הַחַיִּים מִתַּחַת
וְעַל אַחֲרוֹן יְקוֹד צָרָתָם
תִּרְדַּ הַשִּׁכְחָה הַשְׁחֹרָה -
וְאֶתָּה עַר בְּלֵהוֹת
מֵעַל לַחֲשֻׁכָה.
וּכּוֹכַב כִּי יִפּוֹל
מִחֲרֹדֶת לֵהָב שְׂאֵגָה עוֹלָה
מִמִּצְקֵי הָאֲבִדוֹן לְשָׁמַיִם -
וְנִפֹּל הַכּוֹכַב אֶל נַפְשָׁהּ
וְכָבֶה בְּתַהוֹמָהּ.

וּבְהִיּוֹת הַבִּקֹּר
וְהִנֵּה מְרַחֵף אֶתָּה עַל פְּנֵי הַתְּהוֹם
לִרְקוֹעַ עָלָיו אֶת שָׁמַיָּה הָעֲמֻקִּים
וְהַשֶּׁמֶשׁ הַגָּדוֹל בִּידָיָה -
עַד עָרֵב.

-
1. The title of this poem is interesting - "Psalm". Believing that ABY writes in a symbolistic way, I would say this is a form of prayer.
(Job, in the Book of Job, bitterly questions the just government of G-d, in the desolate questing of his soul.
He says
"Terrors are let loose on me
30:15
The night racks my bones
30:17
I waited for the light, and darkness fell."
30:26, etc.
Yet this is a prayer, in a way, and G-d answers Job from the whirlwind. 38:1)

This poem calls to mind Psalm 118:5

Later it says: He is become my salvation - v. 14.

It also calls to mind Psalm 116:3

But I called on the name of the L--d
Gracious is the L--d. Our G-d is compassionate.

Clearly there is a hint of the G-d of Creation, or Destiny, controlling all of life from above, in the end of ABY's poem.

THEME

This is a cyclic poem and concerns the complexity of man.¹ There are different worlds - there are so many worlds inside him. In the day everything is sunny and bright, and vastly interesting - but comes the night - it consists of horrors and nightmares. This poem is almost manic-depressive in mood, as it hovers between the heights amid the stars, down to hell.²

לְרֹגְעִים כְּאֵד מְעֻשִׂים יֵשׁ אֶתֶר חֲשָׁא
בְּךָ אֵת נִפְשְׁךָ כְּאֵגֶל הַמּוֹלֵחַ:

"At very rare moments you sometimes raise

Your soul within you like a crystal drop."

There are a few moments of happiness and we see the crystal sparkle in the sunlight, and your world trembles to express itself in a spurt of outpouring; it cannot bear its "fullness". You address yourself to all the worlds, and airy distances flow from your eyes, and you think you will see marvelous things, your eyes are lit up from the

-
1. נחמן ז"ל indicated that ABY could have been influenced by a poem of W.B. Yeats, freely translated by Zach, entitled לְכַשְׁתִּיקֵינִי published in 1893.
לפני שער עם נעילה, דבר, 11.6.60.
 2. "Me miserable. Which way shall I flie. Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire? Which way I flie is Hell; myself am Hell; and in the lowest deep a lower deep still threatening to devour me opens wide ..." (Milton)

crystal, but joy and beauty change radically to deepening nightmares of despair and darkness. You are being hunted down! things find you from far and near and they seek your soul!¹

In this poem, **ליל המוות**, there is a tremendous tension of creative energy, and ambivalence, between death, on the one hand, as against euphoria on the other. (We see the same qualities in **מלכות** (Royalty).)

In the first five or six lines a lovely luminous Platonist image is evolved, very central to Romanticism.

You have the bright light show of the diaphanous seethrough world:²

-
1. A Treatise on White Magic, by Bailey Alice A., 1934. Lucis Publishing Co. N.Y. p. 150.
"As he is but wrestling towards perfection and has not yet attained, these interludes of silence, withdrawingness, and of detachment are frequently difficult and dark. All is silence and he stands appalled by the unknown, and by the apparently empty stillness in which he finds himself. This is called, in advanced cases, "The dark night of the soul" - the moment before dawn, the hour before the light streams forth."
 2. Compare the flowers floating down the river in **כנרת הירוקה** (1912) .

However, beneath all this is terror when the poet faces the unseen.

The Romantic trend underlies ABY's lines but the feeling is one of consternation and sheer terror: it is not a sense of beauty.

If the world is like a crystal drop, it is something a) that you can see through and b) it can break. It is delicately formed.

Indeed, he has a sense of the world as being something exquisite, but unreliable, something that is prone to shatter.

He writes

ועיניך לעולם
פאל אגל הבדלח •
ואולם עולם הן יחד להשפך
ובמלאו לא יעמד

One would think this is a beautiful image (a sense of beauty, the spirit released) but this is not the case.

There is the nightmare of the soul, being sought from all sides.

As Lask translates:

"And deep within them lurk the horrors of the dark
While if things near and far should meet with you

They require your soul."¹

The poet felt horrific forces seeking his destruction.

If we look at the first verse, האני השר says
 "Sometimes you can see your own soul, and it is like a
 prism, like a crystal: it is a full world, with hundreds of
 glimmering facets; it is like a drop of dew (as if it were
 one complete entity) but when you look at it carefully, it
 is not one thing; when light is reflected on it, we see
 hundreds of lights coming from all directions"² - and his
 soul is like that.

His world is full of sunshine, and he is drawing fully from
 the sunshine; many colours are reflected; there is a whole
 collection of sights, בנסת מראות

ועיניך לעולמן / פאל אגל הפדלח and your
 eye is drawn to the multiplicity of facets as it is drawn
 to the crystal drop, and he is fascinated by this. It may
 or may not be beautiful but it enthrals him; it is so full,
 it is endless and infinite. It changes as you see it in
 different lights. In other words he is amazed at the
 kaleidoscopic complexities of man.

1. ובעיני ממשפטים בהן יתעמקו
 ומצאנהם העבריים קרובים -
 ודרשו בפשט.

2. Free translation.

But there is something else shining out from the eyes, and that is the fear of the darkness, and the unknown that is also involved with the "far"; the good and the bad are enclosed within each other; they are built into each other. And the far away things, and the abyss, near and dark, within you, come to claim your soul. They are the ones that own you. They are a part of you.

The poet continues

בְּדַם יְהִי לִי
תַעֲמִיד בְּרֹאשׁ הַקָּיִם
וְאֵל בֵּין כּוֹכָבִים קָרִים וְגִדּוּלִים תִּשָּׂא
רֹאשׁוֹ.

In the dead of night, he stands at the very top¹ of the mountains and wants to put his head amongst the stars, shining bright. Each person is a star. He feels affinity, because he feels other people are also stars, but he does not feel warm or intimately close to them. He is separated from them. Stars are actually far apart. He calls them

כוֹכָבִים קָרִים וְגִדּוּלִים

Each one is great, and each one is cold.² Even if he found a friend, (which is considered by the outside world to constitute friendship), he still sees him as another

-
1. Notice the third line, in this verse
... וְאֵל בֵּין כּוֹכָבִים ... is the longest line in the poem, the line about putting your head amongst the stars ...
 2. Don't look up to heaven, for what will you see in the sky, except stars, luminous but cold, wholly insensitive to pity? (Peretz: Drie Matones 1904 15 L.P. 187).

star, a cold star; he does not see stars as warm. They are big but there is no joy in them. He does not mention light in the stars. Light would give a feeling of warmth, a feeling of good. On the contrary, they are cold! He sees the negative.

What else does he say? In the position where he stands, high among the stars, he says:

וְשָׁקַע לְאֶרֶץ הַחַיִּים שָׁמַח

He says that life is so low, going down and down.

וְעַל אֲחִירֵן יִקְוֶה צָרוֹתָם

It is as if a black veil or cover is closing over the last burning suffering.

He rises with the intellectuals, standing on top of the mountains; he is among the other stars, unconnected; he is sinking down, thinking, whether it be his צָרוֹת , there, down below, his pain, or someone else's. The whole world is going down, down, into the darkness. He peers to distinguish between the צָרוֹת , and then it can't be seen anymore. So he stands up on high with the unfriendly stars, and even his feelings below are covered up from his view. He is quite isolated in this huge universe! Even those burning צָרוֹת , not burning happiness, nor burning desire, but at least some sort of warmth, are sinking into oblivion.

And now:-

וְאַחַר שֶׁ בִּלְהוֹת
מֵעַל לוֹשְׁכָּה.

You waken night-marish, stunned! it is frightening; there is no warmth from the top, and no bond of any sort with what is below, only a fearful plummeting, or a being suspended in mid-air.

And if a star should fall into his heart (it could be a star of love or any other star), it could only become extinguished.

וְכֹכַב כִּי יִפֹּל

וְנִפֹּל הַכֹּכֶב אֶל נִפְשׁוֹ
וְכִבְה בְּתֵהוֹמָה.

Somewhere in his heart, it is cold. There is no place in his heart for love.¹ His heart is full of endless, painful emptiness. The star falls into the abyss (בְּתֵהוֹמָה) of his soul, and identifies with the vast universal abyss (תֵּהוֹמָה) of Creation.

What kind of star would tear itself from the other stars, and try to enter? A star shaken by the fear of a sharp scream coming from the abyss below. It must have been a great scream to cause a star to fall, shaken out of its cold orbit!

1. Dostoevski said there is no greater hell than the suffering of not being able to love.

Comes morning, the stars can no longer be seen, but they are still floating.

Now "you" have the power of the big sun in your hands, and "you" try and take control
but -

the evening is coming; the sun will go away, and once more you are back to where you started, a star floating above the darkness.¹

The abyss is always there. You can't get rid of it. There will be cycles again, and stars again.

He intimates that maybe the answer is with G-d. Maybe it is from the Creation, from the beginning, from the beginning of the world, and that perhaps our destiny started from the very first morning of Creation, and that is how it has to be. So our destiny was proclaimed not

1.

וּבְהִיוֹת הַבֹּקֶר
וְהָיָה מִדְּחַף אָמָה עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּהוֹם
לְרַעַע עָלֶיךָ אֶת שְׁמִירַת הָעֵמֶקִים
וְהַשֶּׁמֶשׁ הַגָּדוֹל בְּיָדֶיךָ -
עוֹ עָרֵב.

from the day we were born but from the day the world was born.¹

The story of Creation in the Bible fits in very strongly here: **בֵּלֶךְ, עָרֵב, מְדַחֵף עַל פְּנֵי הַחֹמַם, לִרְקוֹעַ אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם, שֶׁמֶשׁ, כּוֹכָבִים וְכוּ'**

There is a hint of G-d or Destiny controlling all this from above.

The sun in his hands; this denotes power, but while the sun is in his hands, he is hovering over the surface of the abyss, - suspended in mid-air! This is helplessness. There is dramatic irony in this. (Each opposite reinforces the other.)

1. Here are strong associations with **בְּרֵאשִׁית**. On the fourth day of Creation, G-d created the sun (**הָמָאֹר הַגָּדוֹל**).

POEM 8

1 כְּנֻטוֹת הַיּוֹם

WRITTEN 1912 (When the poet was 29 years old)

בְּשִׁקוֹעַ מְדוּרוֹת חַיֵּינוּ הָאֲדָמוֹת
נִסִּיר מַעַל מִצְחֵנוּ זֶר הַחֲגִיגוֹת
פְּרוֹעַ הָעֵלִים וְהַשּׁוֹשְׁנִים הַנוֹשְׁרוֹת
וְאַחַר הַיָּמָם נִרְדֵּ אֶל הַנְּהָרוֹת.

וּכְנֻטוֹת הַיּוֹם נַעֲמֹד עַל שְׂפָתָם
בְּעֵינֵים תְּרוֹת אַחֲרֵי מְרוּצָתָם
הַעֲזוּבִים וְהַגָּאִים לְאִין קָצָה בְּבִדְיוּתָם.

וְלִשְׁמָף אוֹדֶם הָעֶרְבִים
נִפְעָמִים נִרְאָה וְהֵנָּה פְּרָחִים בָּאִים
פְּרָחִים לְבָנִים
נִשְׁאִים בִּיקָר עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם
מִפְּנֵת גֶּזֶן מֵאֲשֶׁר נִגְרְפוּ
בְּשִׁחּוֹק בְּצִהָרִים.

וַיִּדְעֵנוּ לְעֵינֵינוּ עֲבָרוֹ נַעֲוִירֵנוּ
וּבְהָעֶרֶב זְכָרָם בְּנִפְשָׁנוּ
יָמֵי יְחֻשִׁיהָ צֵל יְגוֹן-עֲרֵבוֹת עַל רִאשֵׁינוּ.
וְאוֹלָם מִמַּעַל יִדְרוֹהַ כּוֹקֵב אַחֵר עַל פְּנֵי הָרִים
וַיִּרְדֵּ לִילָה גְדוֹל וְזֶר עָלֵינוּ
וְרוּחַ עֶרֶב יִגַּע בָּנוּ וְהִמָּה כְּעַל כְּנוֹרוֹת שְׁחֹזְרִים.

-
1. כְּנֻטוֹת הַיּוֹם has strong verbal concordances
with Bialik's פִּעֲמֵי אֲבִיב

Bialik speaks of בְּלִבְנֵת הַפְּרָחִים

and again וְהַשְׁתַּפְּכוּ בְּפִרְחִים לְבָנִים גַּם נַעֲוִירֵי הַחֲזָשִׁים וְחִלּוּמוֹתַי
ABY too, speaks of "white flowers" פְּרָחִים לְבָנִים
and he speaks of "our youth" passing.

וַיִּדְעֵנוּ לְעֵינֵינוּ עֲבָרוֹ נַעֲוִירֵנוּ

(הַמוֹנֵת הַפְּרָחִים הַנִּישָׂאִים בַּמַּיִם מִזְכִּירָה אֶת תְּמוֹנַת מוֹחָה שֶׁל אוֹפִילִיָּה בִּ"הַמֶּלֶט" שֶׁל שְׁקֶספִיר)

כנסות היום is a representative transcendentalist poem, dealing with the unknowable character of ultimate reality, written in 1912, when ABY was 29 years old.

Immediately, at the beginning of the poem we have connotations of victory, with the festal wreath, but it is a weary victory; it is worn out; the festal wreath must be removed.

בשקע מדורות-תנינו האדמות
נסיר מעל מצחנו זר - התגיגות
פרוע העלים והשושנים הנולדות
ואחר דומם נרד אל הנדחות.

"With its weary leaves and withered rose petals falling"

We see in this the symbol of the transience of ordinary experience, of everything passing away.

וכנסות היום נעמוד על שפתם
בעינים תרות אחרי מריצתם

This could be a reference to the human ego, and what it experiences in human terms, isolated and proud, yet prone to wither and fade, and frail.

In other words, he is following the leaves and the withered rose petals. They are "Forsaken yet infinitely proud in their isolation".

העונבים והגאים לאין קצה בבדידותם

The line לשקף אום - הערבים

situates the poem in the evening; this obviously has the

larger metaphor of the evening of life behind it.

נִפְעָמִים נִרְאָה וְהֵנָּה פְּרָחִים בָּאִים
פְּרָחִים לְבָנִים
נִשְׁאָרִים בִּיָּקָר עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם
מִכְנֶנֶת בֶּן מֵאֶשֶׁר נִגְרַפָּה
בְּשָׂחוֹק בְּצַחֲלִים.¹

They are borne daintily along upon the waters; this could be a meditative symbol; water is immediately a symbol of contemplation.²

This poem starts

בְּשִׁקְעַ מְדֻרָּחַת - תֵּינִינֵי הָאֲדָמָה

פְּרִיעַ הָעֵלִים וְהַשּׁוֹשְׁנִים הַנוֹשְׁרֹת

-
1. We note the highlighted effect of the two words only, נִפְעָמִים לְבָנִים in a line: in the first verse they were withered and weary rose petals, now they are white blossoms, and they are borne daintily (נִשְׁאָרִים בִּיָּקָר) which means light and beautiful and not old and worn, and they were laughingly swept away at noon. Here is a change of rhythm. (נִשְׁאָרִים בִּיָּקָר could mean "unexpectedly or suddenly! See Alkalay Dictionary.) (The translation of Lask's "Borne daintily along upon the waters, is more likely to mean with honour, dignity, respect or splendour.)
נִפְעָמִים לְבָנִים could refer to death. If בְּצַחֲלִים is meaning "suddenly", "unexpectedly" as can we see in the Alkalay dictionary, being clear cut and incisive and sudden, it could hint of death.
We must remember that ABY was particularly interested in the meanings of words and composed a book on synonyms.
 2. In many poems water emerges in a meditative reflective context eg in W.B. Yeats' "The Wild Swans of Coole", the poet talks of the water brimming like a mirror.
D.H. Lawrence is perpetually drowning his characters; there is the baptism myth, also the purging of the flood.

but now, the flowers are transformed; he has renewed them on the waters, but nevertheless there is something underlying this that is flimsy, delicate, insubstantial and likely to pass away.

וַיִּזְעַנּוּ לְעֵינֵינוּ עֲבָרֵי נַעֲרֵינוּ.

He takes the blossom symbol and in retrospect goes back to his own youth, in meditation, and relives his youth's experiences, which is fragile and transient.

In the following three lines attention is drawn to the fact that we see with our very own eyes that the evening of life is coming..

וַיִּזְעַנּוּ לְעֵינֵינוּ עֲבָרֵי נַעֲרֵינוּ
וּבְהֶעָרַב זָכַרְט פִּנְשָׁנוּ
1 יֵט יִחְסֹךְ צֶל יְגוֹן - עֲרֻבוֹת עַל רִאשֵׁינוּ.

ABY ends the poem with a disquiet and a dread:

וְאוֹלָם מַעַל יִדָּחַ כּוֹכֵב אַחֵר כּוֹכֵב עַל פְּנֵי הָרִים

-
1. This, when translated freely, would be "we knew with our own eyes (in front of our very eyes) that our youth had passed, and when the memory thereof became sweet in our souls, or when the memory thereof came towards evening, i.e. came towards the end, the shadow of sorrow of evening (again the word "evening" - (could be the sorrow of ageing) extended and became dark over our heads". In this verse, the letter Ayin, meaning "eye" is repeated six times, and the word "evening" appears in a sometimes contrived "dyslectic" manner three times, viz.

עָבְרִי, וּבְהֶעָרַב, יְגוֹן-עֲרֻבוֹת

So we saw with our very eyes (and there are all these letters "ע"י").

This is a long line of the stars stepping out; the middle line is short and conclusive, as the end of life,

וַיֵּרֶד לַיְלָה גִּדּוּל וָזֶר עָלֵינוּ

and the last line is long as of a long moaning and mourning.

1 וְרִיחַ-עֶרֶב יָגַע בְּנוֹ וְהִמָּה פָעַל בְּנוֹרוֹת שְׁחֹרִים

The alliteration of the "Mem" sound in וְהִמָּה - accentuates the moaning.

This is deeply Romantic. One could conflate several elements: one is death; behind death there is the image of the supply; behind the supply is the image of terror - all these elements rolled into that lovely image of the stars stepping over the mountains. This can be quite frightening; there are so many new stars stepping over the mountains. The old stars are forgotten, never to be

-
1. In Ps 137 we read "We sat and cried when we remembered Zion at the rivers of Babylon, and hung our harps in the willow trees" (v 1 & 2); and in v. 4 "How shall we sing the L--d's song in a foreign land?" In כְּנַסְתָּ הַיָּם, our youth was remembered, and in the Psalm, Zion was remembered. In the Ps. there is a foreign land, and in כְּנַסְתָּ הַיָּם there is a strange night, and the כְּנַסְתָּ הַיָּם feature in both.

remembered again.¹

He has two phases: he doesn't have a resolution; he simply has the problem of transience, on the one hand, and then he has the problem of the silent world, the wordless world, that which can't be expressed in words (night image). It is almost as if he accepts the fact that there is no solution. His own world is made up of regret on the one hand and terror on the other, but both are infused with beauty. There is that deeper agenda underlying it, which might be his solution.

In this poem, there is a dreadful angst, because he did not have an answer as to what lies behind this life.

Like Kant, whom ABY admired so much, ABY was greatly inspired by one of the great mysteries of the world, "the starry heavens above"; not only inspired, but also apprehensive: what happens to the old stars, when the hosts

1. ABY talks about new stars on the horizon, or stars falling, or cold stars. He also wrote a prayer for a little boy, about the stars in the sky.

שֵׁם שְׁלוֹם עַל עֵינַי
וְעֶסֶת בּוֹכֵבִים עַל רֹאשׁ תְּלוּמוֹתַי ...

(Goldberg Leah,
loc. cit.

פגישת עם מאורד

p. 24,

of new ones come to take their place?¹

The brevity of life shocked ABY. In this poem, he stands there at the flowing river and sees the flowers passing, they continue to pass, and everything passes. One is nothing; everything is going, the people are going. He did not see anything as permanent.

For those who wish to accept it, there could be a reference in מלכות to the stars.

שער שחר = Coma Berenice = a galaxy of stars. It could easily be in keeping with ABY's character to use mysterious references (See

שער בירוניקה - קבוצת כוכבים
אבן שושן, מלון חדש, ירושלים, תש"ל) .

1. Abram, in Genesis 15:5 was told to count the stars of the sky, if he could! also Genesis 22:17 etc.

POEM 9

WRITTEN 1902

בלילה יעבור סער

בַּלִּילָה יַעְבוֹר סַעַר עַל פְּנֵי שְׂחֹר אֲדָמָתָהּ
וְהַשְׁתַּעַר עַל יַעְרוֹת הוֹגֵי-אוֹנִם וּמַרְטִיבֵי-טְרַפִּיהֶם
וְגִדְל חַם נְשִׁימַת שְׁדוֹת
וְגִלָּה נְהָרוֹת וְהִכָּה מַעְרוֹמִיָּהֶם
וְנִשָּׂא אֶדָם.

בַּלִּיל זֶה

אֶל קִירוֹת בֵּיתָה יִלְחָץ כְּבֹד-נְשִׁימָה וְגוֹנֵחַ
וּמְבוֹהֵל יָנוּם הַיַּעֲרָה
וּמְהַרָּה כָּל יָשׁוּב בַּשְּׂרִיקָה
וְנִפֶּחַ דִּלְתָהּ וְהַתְּפֹרֵץ אֶל עֲלִיתָהּ
וַיִּלְלֵת שְׂחֹקוֹ מְזוֹרְעוֹת-חֵלֹם קוֹדְחוֹת תְּנַתְּקָה
וְצִנָּת מַעֲוֹפוֹ תִּגַּע בְּמַצְחָהּ הַלּוֹהֵט
וְהַלָּאָה יַעֲוֶף וְהַלָּאָה יִילֵל.

וְכִכָּה תִשָּׁכַב:

גּוֹ כְּבֹד וְאוֹבֵד וְנִשְׁמָה מְהִבֶּהֶבֶת
וְרֵב-קָשֶׁב תִּקְשִׁיב
גְּלוּי-עֵינִים וְחַפְזֵשׁ-לִילָה.

עַד יָבוֹא יוֹם צָעִיר וְחוֹר-פָּנִים
וּבְעֵינָיו הַתּוֹהוֹת יִבִּיט אֶל תּוֹךְ הָעוֹלָם
וְעָרְגָה לְקִרְאָתוֹ כָּל עֲגָמַת גַּעְגּוּעִיהָ
וְחִרְדָּתָהּ

וְלֹא תִדַּע אֶת נַפְשָׁהּ -
הֵן עָבַר אָבִיב עָלֶיהָ
הַלִּילָה בַּעֲבֹר-סַעַר.

In the poem the "I" talks to the "thou" (this is one person). The "I" tells the "thou": "One day a great storm will come upon you and wreak havoc, it will assault you, and attack you, and fall upon you, and you will be physically and emotionally shocked and startled. Be aware that that 'destructive' storm is really creative, it will bring the spring, a time of a new birth".

The poem is written in the future tense.¹ The key to the poem is the title בְּלִילָה יַעֲבֹר סַעַר together with the third last line, וְלֹא תֵדָע אֶת נַפְשְׁךָ . You will not know yourself, you will not understand life. But if you focus on the winter storm, you will not be able to appreciate or even notice the creative rebirth of the new season of spring. There can only be a spring if winter comes first. Let the winter come and go.

As Shelley said "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?"²

The "I" says to the "thou".

"In the night a storm will pass over your land, and over you"

בְּלִילָה יַעֲבֹר סַעַר . . .

- - - -

עַד יָבוֹא יוֹם צִעִיר וְחָמֵר - פָּנִים

-
1. According to grammatical rules, the Vav Conversive can convert past to future. The poem starts בְּלִילָה יַעֲבֹר סַעַר - "at night the storm will pass ..."
 2. Ode to the West Wind (Percy Bysshe Shelley).

"Until a pale-faced young day will come (the spring) -
and you have been longing for it.

וערָגהּ לַקִּרְאָתוֹ כָּל עֶגְמוֹת גַּעְגּוּעֶיהָ

but be aware of it, or spring may pass over you, without
your realising it, that storm night."

וְלֹא תִדְעַ אֶת נִפְשָׁהּ
- הֵן עָבַר אֲבִיב עָלֶיהָ
הַלֵּילָה בַּעֲבֹר - סָעָר.

Be ready for the spring!

Here we have a message: that life is one "whole".

1-13 is divided into two main parts. 1-13
consists of the ravishing of the storm wind. 14-24
describes what man thinks and feels, depending on nature,
describing the results of what the wind has done.

1-5 is the work of the wind, attacking and assaulting the
land, the forests, the fields and the rivers.

6-13 is a fearful attack on the house

אֶל אִירֹת בֵּיתָהּ יִלְחָץ כָּבֵד - נְשִׁימָה וְגֹנֶה

וְנִפֶּץ זִלְתָּהּ וְהִתְפָּרֵץ אֶל עֲלִיתָהּ

"Its howling laughter snatching you from arms of feverish
dream

Its chill flight touching on your glowing brow.

Then on it flies and as it flies it howls."

וַיִּלֶּחַת שְׁחֹקוֹ מִדְּרוֹעוֹת - וַחֲלוֹם קוֹרָחוֹת חֲנִיָּקָה
וַצִּנֹּת מְעוּפוֹ תָּגַע בְּמִצְחָהּ הַלֹּוֹהֶט
וְהַלֵּאָה יַעֲוֹר וְהַלֵּאָה זִיִּלִּיל.

This is a physical attack, as of a man raping a woman.

וַצִּנֹּת מְעוּפוֹ תָּגַע בְּמִצְחָהּ הַלֹּוֹהֶט

In lines 14-20, the ravished one lies panting and very tense

גֵּר פָּבֵד וְאוֹבֵד וְנִשְׁמָה מִחֲבֻכָּת
גְּלוּי - עֵינָיִם וְחַפּוּשׁ - לִילָה

(The alliteration describes the heaving of the heavy body and the panting.)

The storm appears in בְּלִילָה יַעֲוֹר סֶעַר as violent and threatening. The storm can be in one's own soul. Here is a drama with 4 actors:

1. the storm
2. the אֲנִי
3. the אַתָּה
4. the young and pale-faced day of spring.

The אֲנִי tells the אַתָּה what will happen in the future. The אֲנִי knows the אַתָּה does not know. The storm will pass through his fields, assault his forests, heat the breath of the fields, expose the rivers and beat their

nakedness till vapours rise from them (וְנִשְׂאָא דָם).
And there will be a horrific night of terrorizing panting
and groaning, and the attacker's running away, but coming
back for more, with howling sounds, beating the door and
bursting into the attic, and "Its howling laughter
snatching you from arms of feverish dream".

וְלִילָה שְׁחֹקוֹ מְדֻרְעוֹת - חֵלֹם קוֹדְחוֹת תְּנַתֵּקָה

"From the arms of the feverish dream", implies into the
arms of the attacker.

The horror-struck א ת ה lies there

וְכִכָּה תִשָּׁעַב:
גֹּר פֶּבֶד וְאוֹבֵד וְנִשְׁמָה מִתְּבַהֶבֶת
וְרֵב - קָשֶׁב תִּקְשִׁיב
גְּלוּי - עֵינַיִם וְתַפּוּשׁ - לִילָה.

with staring eyes and caught up by the night.

In בלילה יעבור סער the addressee (נ מ ע) or the
א ת ה lies open-eyed, bewildered.

(ת פ ו ש - ל י ל ה) He is not really awake. He does not
know what has happened to him, and there is a feeling of
intense aloneness in that wakefulness in the dark.

וְכִכָּה תִשָּׁעַב:
גֹּר פֶּבֶד וְאוֹבֵד וְנִשְׁמָה מִתְּבַהֶבֶת
וְרֵב - קָשֶׁב תִּקְשִׁיב
גְּלוּי - עֵינַיִם וְתַפּוּשׁ - לִילָה.

Body and soul are in a blurred state.

There is a polarity of opposites between the "eye" - and
the senses. The eyes are open גלוי - עינים
but the soul is blurred, תפוש - לילה

Now there is a turning point, a new young day arrives (a
new insight). The new day arrives, deeply wondering at the
world עד יבוא יום צעיר וחדש - פנים

and you, the אלה - that is what you always wanted
without your realizing it perhaps! You didn't know that
this very spring that you needed so much, would be brought
by the winter storm. If you want to know yourself, if you
really want to understand life, don't let spring pass you
by by giving winter all your attention.

The addressee, the "thou" doesn't really understand. When
the אלה explains it in lines 23 and 24, he starts to
understand it.

- הן עבר אביב עליך
תלילה בעבר - סער.

This looks as though it is written in the past tense,

עבר אביב עליך, but this is not so. The entire
poem is written in the future.

ולא תודע את נפשוך

You will not "be aware" (from Song of Songs 6:12) that
spring will have passed you by, that night in the passing

of the storm, this is a message from the "I" to the "thou", to be aware that spring is coming - to live through the winter patiently.

Man is set up against the background of nature. Man is as nothing against the powers of nature. The whole gamut of emotions is expressed by the **אני** to the **אתה**. It reaches its peak when he proclaims: "You won't know your own soul!"

וְלֹא תֵדָע אֶת נַפְשְׁךָ

This is a phrase from **שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים** and is an emotional outburst of a love that is confusing, meaning "you will not be aware".¹

As with a lover, his orientation is blocked out, and he is inwardly confused, he does not know that spring is coming. Fortunately, the "I" explains.

1. Song of Songs 6:12
"Before I was aware, my soul set me upon the chariots of my princely people."

Comparison with Bialik's "פ ע מ י א ב י ב"

In Bialik's poem פ ע מ י א ב י ב and ABY's poem, spring causes the soul situation. With Bialik, the reader knows at the beginning what is going to happen.

עַל הַהָר עוֹמְדוֹת רַגְלֵי הָאֲבִיב

"On the mountain stand my feet of spring". One can understand the feelings that will emerge. Everything will be beautiful.

ABY departs from the Bialik understanding of spring in פ ע מ י א ב י ב . (For Bialik spring was automatically renewal of youth, not so for ABY. They have words in common, but not the same nuance of meaning.)

Bialik writes of

אֲדִים וְנִסִּים

ABY writes

וְגִדְלֵי חֵם נִשְׁיֶמֶת שָׁדוֹת
וְאֵלֶּה נִהְרֹת וְהִפָּה מִעֲרוֹמֵיהֶם
וְנִשְׂא אֹדֶם.

Bialik writes "There are mists from the sun and buds develop from the wet trees."

ABY writes of "wet leaves".

מִרְטֵיבִי-סִרְפִּיהֶם

The word טָרַף occurs in Ezekiel 17:9.

פֶּל - טָרַף צִמְחָה הִיבֹשׁ

"It shall wither in all the leaves of her spring."

G-d sends Ezekiel with a message to the rebellious ones;
viz. "Could things prosper, Would the fruitful land not
wither?".

Bialik uses טָרַף in אֶל הַצִּפּוֹר

וַיֵּמָח לָךְ טָרְפֵיהֶם לַחֲסִי¹

1.

ביאליק חיים נחמן, כל שירי ביאליק, דביר, הל אביב, תשי"ד

THE DRAMA OF בלילה יעבור סער

The storm pushes on you, and you think it is going to crush you; and he says

אל קירוח פיתך ילחץ פכד - נשימה וגו'נת

The whole world seems to be pushing you, moaning and groaning, and it plays on your nerves and feeling of well-being, and it will break down your door and go into your attic and there will be total invasion and it will pull you out of your dream, and the ghostly moistness will touch your forehead.

נצנת מעופו הגע במצוקה הלוחט

and your body is "lost" and heavy and your soul is flickering and panting, almost like dying away, and you listen carefully

וככה תשכב :

גו פכד ואזכר ונשימה מתכחבת

ורב-קשב תלשיב

גדוי-עינים ותפוש-לילה.

You are still half asleep, but your eyes are torn wide open. You are half asleep, but your soul is wide awake. The big storm, that is shaking and pressurizing you, and keeping you breathless, and making you flicker away, is making you too frightened to move. Your body is still sleeping, but you were so shocked that your mind and eyes see everything. You are aware that you must take great

care. Before you know anything, because you have been so distressed and concerned about what has happened to you in the past, the advent of spring will pass you by and you won't even notice it. His soul caught up on this message faster than the body. His eyes are lying there watching - they are the window to his soul. He is like a prisoner, and he is looking from the inside of his prison! It is painful and pitiful. The body is הַפּוֹשֵׁט לַיָּל, caught up in the night, a victim of destiny, perhaps old age, or even death! (that is the cycle of life!) But his soul does not want that. His soul does not want to take part in that cycle. He is lying there, waiting for the day to break, a normal young day is coming, and he talks of all his yearning, and says to be careful about this, because this is exactly the moment that he wants it to continue, that he doesn't want the cycle of life to go too fast. He doesn't want the body to die so fast; the soul that is within wants to conquer the cycle.

The הַפּוֹשֵׁט לַיָּל (still sleeping) is more the physical body, but the גִּלְדֵי - עֵינַיִם is more the soul. The windows to the soul are wide awake, totally different, they see everything.

This is called בְּלִילָה יַעֲבֹר סֹעַר, the night of the big storm, which shook him, and the storm cruelly tormented and mocked him, as if to say, "you're growing old". It shook

him. Maybe that is the insight that he got, that he is not getting younger!

He is talking to himself. His soul is talking to his "whole". Later his soul takes over and divorces itself from the physical vessel.

The big storm could have brought a flash of spring to him, maybe his poems, maybe his memories. We don't know - because of the duality of poetry.

POEM 10

בודדים אומרים

WRITTEN IN 1918 (the poet was 35 years old)

יום ליום יִנְחִיל שְׁמֶשׁ דּוֹעֶכֶת
וְלִילָה עַל לִילָה יִקְוֶנָּה
וְקוֹץ אַחֵר קוֹץ יֵאָסֵף בְּשִׁלְכָתָהּ
וְעוֹלָם מַצְעָרוֹ מִתְרוֹנֵן.

וּמִחֵר נְמוּת וְאֵין הַדִּבֵּר בָּנוּ
וּכְיוֹם צִאֲתָנוּ נַעֲמֹד לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר עִם נִעִילָה
וְלֵב כִּי יַעֲלוּ הֵן אֱלֹהִים קִרְבָּנוּ
וְהַתְנַחֵם - וְחֵרֵד מִפְּחַד הַמַּעֲיִלָּה.

יום ליום יֵשָׂא שְׁמֶשׁ בּוֹעֶרֶת
וְלִילָה אַחֵר לִילָה יִשְׁפּוּהַּ בּוֹכָבִים
עַל שִׁפְתֵי בּוֹדְדִים שִׁירָה נִעְצָרֶת:
בְּשִׁבְעַת דְּרָכִים נִתְפַּלֵּג וּבְאַחַד אָנוּ שָׁבִים.

This poem is on loneliness (or alone-ness); "how "the few" (or the "alone ones" give their message. In בּוֹדְדִים אֹמְרִים , loneliness, or aloneness is a source of pride. As Leah Goldberg wrote of ABY "he still wanted to live his life of exalted loneliness".¹

1. Goldberg, Leah,

פגישה עם משורר, 1952, p. 56,

Loc. cit.

Gorpein says of בודדים , "this is a poem about death: nevertheless, it is a poem of faith".¹

The first two lines of בודדים אמרים

יום ליום ינהיל שמש יועכה
ולילה על לילה יקונן

(which changes later to a warm happy outpouring of light) reminds us of Psalm 19 v 1-4. There are very strong concordances.

השמים מספרים כבוד-אל
ומעשה ידיו מגיד תהלה
יום ליום יביע אמו
ולילה ללילה יחזה-דעה :

We learn from these sublime lines that the message which is conveyed to man by the sight of the heavens comes to him without the employment of audible sound.

In ABY's poem day bequeaths a flickering sun unto day, and night laments night, and summer after summer the leaves are swept away (an allusion to the autumn of life), and the

1. Gorpein
1972, p. 14

Also Gorpein
1972 p. 56.

עם שירים ועם ספורים, מסדה, ר"ג

אמירות בודדות, שדמות

world rejoices in its sorrow. (This is an unusual combination of words - "rejoicing in sorrow"). Perhaps sorrow is an essential ingredient of life.

And tomorrow we shall die and there shall be no word in us, and as at the time of going out, we shall stand before the gate at closing time.

This reminds us of Yom Hakippurim, נְעִילָה, and the Day of Judgement, and the heart is happy because G-d has brought us near, and the heart comforts itself, trembling because of a possible treachery or sacrilege (possibly a demonstration of a certain lack of faith).

In the third verse, day carries a burning sun unto day, and night after night pours forth stars; the sun is no longer flickering out, and night no longer laments night. The writer seems contented to say that on the lips of the lonely ones, (the alone ones, or the few) song is stopped. He seems comfortable with this decision. The line is flooded with silence: the lonely ones are proud. ^{על שפתי בודדים שירה נעצרה} In this way they become unified with the cosmic sense of time. Past and present and future become one in the eternal silent space of time.

He concludes

בְּשֶׁבַע דְּרָכִים נִתְפָּלֵג וּבְאַחַד אָנוּ שָׁבִים

"On seven paths we part, and by one we return."

"Seven" is a traditional number; when we are born we all go different ways, but we all return the same one way. There is no more loneliness. (The one could be an allusion to the Shema.)

This is a seemingly simple poem, but it has a wealth of meaning. It seems to rise from the poet's insistence upon silence as the only means of self-expression.¹

1. Pagis Dan; in Burnshaw S., Carmi T., Spicehandler, E. The Modern Hebrew Poem Itself. Schocken, N.Y. 1965, p. 51.

POEM 11

WRITTEN 1925 AND REWRITTEN FOR THE THIRD TIME IN 1928.
Published in Mizpeh in 1930.

אשרי הזורעים ולא יקצורו

אֲשֶׁרִי הַזֹּרְעִים וְלֹא יִקְצֹרוּ
כִּי יִרְחִיקוּ נְדוּד.

אֲשֶׁרִי הַנְּדִיבִים אֲשֶׁר תִּפְאַרֶת נְעוּרֵיהֶם
הוֹסִיפָה עַל אוֹר הַיָּמִים וּפְזֹרוֹנָם
וְהֵם אֵת עֲדֵינָם הִתְפָּרְקוּ עַל אֵם הַדְּרָכִים.

אֲשֶׁרִי הַגָּאִים אֲשֶׁר גִּאֻתָּם עֲבְרָה גְבוּלֵי נַפְשָׁם
וַתְּהִי כְּעֵנֹת הַלּוּבָן
אַחֲרֵי הַעֲלֹת הַקֶּשֶׁת בַּעֲנָן.

אֲשֶׁרִי הַיּוֹדְעִים אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא לָבָם מִמִּדְבָּר
וְעַל שִׁפְתָּם תִּפְרַח הַדּוּמִיָּה.

אֲשֶׁרֵיהֶם כִּי יֵאָסְפוּ אֶל תּוֹךְ לֵב הָעוֹלָם
לִזְמֵי אֲדָרֶת הַשִּׁכְחָה
וְהִיא חֶקֶם הַתָּמִיד בְּלִי אֶמֶר.

In 1928, the poet was 45 years old, and living in Vienna at the time.

ANALYSIS

This poem, the high point of ABY's poems, because it was

written at a major turning point of his life, is the distillation of the thinking and churning, in the poet's mind, leading up to a dramatic decision in his life.

This is the theme:

This poem started off as a political poem written in ABY's notebook opposite

על מה נבל דגליכם

"Their speech shall not be bitter

לא תמר שפתם

and the memory of the days is their banner"

[...] וְזֶכֶר כָּל הַיָּמִים אֲתֵם דִּיגְלֵם וַיְגֻזֶנּוּ

1

Its nature changed completely. This is a contented poem. It concerns "happiness".

ABY's poem reverse the Biblical meaning of joyful harvesting² to a non-harvesting, and builds itself on a series of paradoxes.

1. Goldberg, Leah.
p. 80. 1952

פגישה עם משורר

loc. cit.

2. Ps. 126:5

הַזֹּרְעִים בְּדִמְעָה בָּרְנָה יִקְצְרוּ

Isaiah 32:20

אֲשֶׁרֵיכֶם זָרְעִי עַל כָּל מַיִם

There is also

אֲשֶׁרִי יוֹשְׁבֵי בֵיתִי

Recited twice

אֲשֶׁרִי הָעֵם שָׁכְנָה לִּי

in the morning and once in the afternoon.
Taken from psalms.

אֲשֶׁרִי הָעֵם שֶׁ' אֱלֹהִיו

Reaping and sowing is a cyclic process and אֲשֶׁר הַזֹּרְעִים
וְלֹא יִקְצֹר is a cyclic non-individualistic
cosmological poem.

In אֲשֶׁר הַזֹּרְעִים וְלֹא יִקְצֹר ABY reflects and
contemplates that the ego can align itself with the
universal principle of cosmic understanding, and also to
some degree of union with the universe and of peace; there
is a oneness with nature; man is a microcosm within the
macrocosm.¹

Silence is a focal point in this poem.¹

This poem concerns "happiness". It starts off with an
enigmatic statement, the opposite of what we would expect.

"Happy are they who sow but do not reap
For they shall wander afar."

אֲשֶׁר הַזֹּרְעִים וְלֹא יִקְצֹר
כִּי יִרְחִיקוּ נָדָד.

-
1. "To thee silence is praise". Ps 65:2.
and Ps. 62:2 says
"Only for G-d does my soul wait in silence".

It is interesting that in 30 C.E. Philo, the Jewish
philosopher of Alexandria, speaks of "a silence that
speaks more clearly than speech". In the human mind,
silence is knowledge of the Deus absconditus, the
hidden g-d, (Encyclopaedia Judaica - under Kabbalah).
This poem could be called "The height of Aspiration -
Silence".

If one is only in one field, one is too narrow, as if one were a frog in a pond; only in the pond, and no further. Perhaps the one sowing, should not find the reward, because if he were to find it, his world would be narrow, within the limited fences of sowing, planting and reaping. Should he not reap what he is sowing, it will force him to enlarge his field. He will grow because his field of activity will grow, and his horizons will extend. He will go far afield, and if he wants to find a big ocean, he will have to find other experience, or otherwise, he will remain in "one little pond". Only then, by going further, will he know where he belongs. Only by leaving will he know where to return.

The sowers could be scattering seed, or knowledge. Perhaps they want to give it away, as they have given away the glory of youth, and their jewelry on the highway (as they give an offering of silence to G-d).

They are proud of what they give. They are not expecting to win or receive any return as fulfilment or reward. In scattering their knowledge, or whatever, on the high ways, they are demonstrating a way of life, a way of giving. Perhaps he previously had a conflict within himself about the way, and how it was necessary to conduct himself on the way, until he found his peace, and concluded that he would accept things as they are, and forgo ambition and

aspiration, so he now withdrew, and made his renunciation and did not write any more. When he had contradictory thoughts, he still wrote.

The line goes further

כִּי נִרְמָה יָקָר נִרְדָּה

Maybe those who don't wait to reap what they have sown are happier because they are not attached to physical possessions. They go where they want to go. Happy are those who gave away their riches, because there is nothing to tie them down, similarly they are not tied down to wait for the reaping. Going far is also a cyclical thing, but it is also a farewell, a wandering far. He does not find it necessary to wait for material reward. He'd rather go somewhere else. He wants to wander, like a nomad. He doesn't want to be attached. Happy are the people who renounce, and give away.¹ He is becoming free.

This poem is a declaration of freedom. Maybe he saw himself as an intellectual previously, of which he was proud. He was proud of his knowledge. He does not want it any more. He has total humility. He renounces it.

1. "The greatest man in history was the poorest."
(Emerson Ralph Waldo : Domestic Life.)

Everything was erased, as if wiped out after the flood and the rainbow appears. It is a new world, totally pure

כַּעֲנַן תְּהִלָּתוֹ , like the humility of the rainbow, the purity of the rainbow. He had been attached to materialistic things, like books and knowledge. He invested himself in it and expected results. It is as if he said "I now declare it all null and void" (Yom Kippur) (Kol Nidrei). He seems to say that those sort of things are not important. Happy are those who know that their heart calls to them from the desert (from the solitude), (or, from the "speaking")¹ then they will sing a song of silence. "And on their lips the silence comes to bloom." He tells us he is not going to write poetry anymore. The desert is a vast space of nothingness, of void. His heart is already calling him from the מִדְבָּר . He renounces his materialistic desires, his expectations, his intellectual pursuits and now the poet in him says farewell. His heart calls him. He is going somewhere else to be on his own.

Happy are those going down in the world, going down in history, to be gathered into the collective heart of the world. There is silence in this. A daily bread, daily sacrifice, לֶחֶם יְמִינִי וְלֶחֶם בֹּקֶר has to be given night and morning.

1. The מִדְבָּר could be from "the desert" or from "the speaking".

Each one hopes he will be able to give something to the pool of collective humanity, and to the heart of the world, our knowledge, our personality, or what we can impress on to other people, whatever we can give. There is a joy in giving thereof; the treasure which ABY gives is silence. He is aware that the people come to the priests with their daily sacrifices, according to their ability.¹

Some would bring intellect, some would bring poetry; he would bring his greatest and most prized possession, silence.

The language used is anchored deeply into cultured Judaism. He gives this as a positive giving to the world; from the totality of daily sacrifice - every morning and every night. His daily sacrifice is the silence, שְׁכֵן הַשָּׁמַיִם.² He is an intellectual and a poet, and a member of western society. Each day he must come and offer it, for his own peace of mind, to G-d, or to the presence within himself. Indeed, for a man who can write poetry so beautifully, and see things in such a clear way, for him it is indeed a

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1. The "tamid" was the daily sacrifice brought to the temple twice a day, night and morning.
 2. שְׁכֵן הַשָּׁמַיִם recalls the silent praise of the heavens in ps 19.

sacrifice to keep silent, and to try to wander as far as possible without being attached to material things.

וְהָיָה הַקֶּסֶם הַתְּמִיד בְּלִי אִמֶּר .

1

In this poem the outside world is a part of himself. The pictures are taken from outside, but it is obviously his own portrait. It is tied to his soul.

As Dan Pagis says, "This poem, אִמֶּר הַזֹּרְעִים וְלֹא יִקְצֹרוּ does not imply despair over language or the fate of poetry" (or illness, or the political situation, or the fact that his books were lost, or any of the other reasons advanced for ABY's silence), but "affirms the poet's conviction and confidence in silence as the only mode of true self-expression,"²

1. Pagis Dan in an article on אִמֶּר הַזֹּרְעִים וְלֹא יִקְצֹרוּ , in Burnshaw, Spicehandler, E. The Modern Hebrew Poem Itself. Schocken, N.Y. 1965, p. 57.

2. Mann Yitzchak
p. 119. 1953, May 8, ספריית פועלים, אורלוביץ,

כך התחילה פריחת הדומיה על שפתו של אברהם בן יצחק. מכאן ואילך הימשך ההקופה הארוכה של שתיקה מדעה, שתיקה של איש, שבגופו מנפח מעיין של דעת וחכמה ללא גבול והוא שותק, שותק מדבון, מתוך הכרה, מתוך פילוסופיה של שתיקה. זוהי נזירות של שתיקה מתמדת עד תומה, עד אשר יאספו אל תוך לב העולם "לוטִי אֶתֶרֶת הַשִּׁכְתָּה וְהָיָה הַקֶּסֶם הַתְּמִיד בְּלִי אִמֶּר".

It could be that in the 12th and 13th lines, ABY is saying "Happy are the proud ones because they are humble (the greatest virtue); they are proud to be humble and their pride lies now in the clean, white un-inked pages."¹

He did not simply stop publishing but preceded that by a firm resolution to adhere to silence. This refutes Leah Goldberg that the tree was cut down and its leaves withered because he decided to be silent and announced this, he was convinced and confident that this was right for him.

In this poem, in a veiled way, the poet will explain WHY he is giving up. He won't tell us directly. This is his swansong. He is going to explain carefully. Being a major decision, he will state clearly what lies behind his decision, and we, the readers, are required to have the ear to hear. Making a decision is amongst the most onerous of tasks, and a milestone. It involves one's entire being, and that entire being would permeate the poem which announces the decision. Therefore in understanding the poem it is essential to be in touch with the entire whole being, of the poet.

1. "In בְּדִיּוּת אִיִּם אֶמְרֵי שִׁמּוּת silence could have been taken as a connotation, or nuance, or hint, or suggestion or undertone but here in אֶשֶׁר הוֹרְעִים וְלֹא יִקְוּרוּ it may be taken as a firm resolution" to adhere to silence. Dan Pagis - see note 1. (previous page)

It has been said:-

"A true Sage keeps his knowledge within himself." ^{1.}

Nevertheless ABY gives it in a veiled but clear poetic way.

1. Cooper, J.C. Taoism : The Way of the Mystic. Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1972, p. 68.

AS I SAT OVER MY BOOKS (Unpublished poem)

על הספרים ישבתי

This poem was written in 1912; it could be a prelude to אשרי הזורעים ולא יקצורו and בוררים אומרים the poem of renunciation and confession, written finally in 1928. This was written in 1912, when the poet was 29 years old.

על הספרים ישבתי
נצח ומקשיב למנגינתם
ויקומו כחותי בלבבי
ואני נצח הרחק מתי אני.

וכי השתר הלהיב והכחיל
בבא אור היום ראשון לאביב
האור משתומם בעולם הריק והרחב
ויכל את לבת פרי.
ויתרחקו מסביב לי פלי הבית
באפלה רבה בבא היום
ושאני יד הערות חורו לפני
על שלחני
המן עזבן
ולפני שכבו כבודות נסיון ועזובות
באור היום באור היום.

והנה צוחת צפור החרידתני
צוחת צפור צוחת צפור.
מה העולם מה העולם
והעולם ריק ונשכח
לפני בא אביב
לפני בא אביב.

The poem depicts a man reading. He distances himself from his body and joins in a spirituality with the book, as though all the physical part of his surroundings have died, even his hands. The hands are important as they represent his own actions (metonymy). And he suddenly feels distanced from his daily activities. A reader holds his books with his hands. That is why "the hands" are mentioned. The hands identify with the book, but they are almost dead because he himself, his physique, is dead. They are "awake", (the hands) עֲרֹת but pale יָפֵן לְפָנָיו, and יָמָא עֲרֵב - the blood has left them. His spirit is totally in unity with the book.

He as a reader explicitly writes how literature and philosophy influence him, how he is totally absorbed by his readings, that he cancels his own self, goes silent because he likes reading. We see how he was influenced by other cultures; the moment he takes a book he loses himself. It is as if he declares that he is losing his "self", because he has found something in which he is totally absorbed.

The repetition, לְפָנָי בֵּא אָבִיב, לְפָנָי בֵּא אָבִיב, and יָמָא עֲרֵב, צִנְחָה צִנְחָה shows the excitement in the poetry feeling, that he was brought back to reality with a jolt. The light of his own ego was totally absorbed into the light of the world, through the books he was reading.

He was taken into it, heart and soul, while he was reading and his own ego was completely blotted out. He had ignored the world outside, and only experienced the joy of the books, distracted, far from life, engrossed. He sat through the night reading.

נָחַם וּמִקְשִׁיב לְמַגִּינָתָם

וְאֵיךְ נָחַם הָרַחֵק מִתְּחִיל אֶנְכִּי.

Why are the hands poor?¹, because they are poor of deeds. Hands are very important, but for him they are just instruments. In themselves they have very little power and very little control. They are of little consequence. The other parts of the body he does not even mention. (My hands are paling in front of my eyes because on my desk the blood has left them.) In this we can see a renunciation of writing. He'd rather have the יָדַי to hold the book, but not to hold the pen and be active and write; he does not accept this anymore; הָיָה יָדָיו ; they have become pale. This was written in פֶּסַח in 1912 (29 years

1. There are two slightly different versions: הָעֵדוּת and הָעֵדוּת are interchangeable.
The Tarshish Dr M. Spitzer version, from a Jerusalem University photostat, date illegible, has the words הָעֵדוּת (as opposed to הָעֵדוּת) וְאֵיךְ יָדָיו הָעֵדוּת.
The hands are "wakeful" to the books, but pale for anything else.

old). There is a conflict of writer and reader. He'd rather just hold the book, and be totally rivetted.

He loved reading and you can hear mentioned very strongly that for him reader and book become one.¹ He was perceptive; from his youth, so perceptive, that he took in as much as a sponge. Canetti said he has a library, but he has no books, the library is in his head.² In the poem there is the shock of something bringing him back to reality, the birds chirping, the immediacy of the here and now.

The last word in the poem is אָבִיב . It is spring and the birds are ready to chirp but he is ready for silence.

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1. The surrender of the ego, in its union with a thou (the books) achieves an enhancement of its own individuality which may be attained in no other way. The ego is not extinguished, but, by metamorphosis and transformation, enters into a higher, supersensual mode of being. Vietor Karl Goethe, the Poet, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1949.
 2. Canetti, Elias: The Play of the Eyes, loc. cit. p. 139.

A NOTE ON ABY'S STYLE

ABY's poems are short, with every word chosen. He uses internal rhyming, free meter, and natural rhythm with movement to describe impressions. His poetry is intellectual rather than emotional. His poems are graphic and vivid, and he invents techniques and devices for describing fleeting moods.

He uses the Bible and other poets, like Bialik, as stepping stones, and he steps out in innovative ways. As Shlonski said, he "sang solo in the choir of poetry".¹ He draws upon an impressive creativity of language phenomena and effects. He makes unusual use of constructs, abstract and concrete descriptions, personification, alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, Vav Ha-chibur and the way of setting out his type.

1. Hakak Lev, עם ארבעה משוררים
1979, p. 25. הוצאת עקד,

In his rhyming, the rhymes are near in sound, yet semantically different (אֶרֶב and אֶרֶץ). He uses adjectives and adverbs in an interesting way; they are unexpectedly divided from the word with which they are connected. His metonymy is interesting, and he uses aristocratic images.

Light moves dynamically in the forest; lights move around the hearth; clouds move hastily across the skies. The reader is involved and taken into a world of tension and imagination (man and woman become precious pearls at the bottom of the sea).

There is no traditional symmetry, but the poetry is organized and unified in style and content. His poetry is distinguished by its unique strength of character.

He writes exquisite, impressionistic lyrical poetry, with an intermingling of scenery and soul, such as had never before been experienced in Hebrew poetry.

PART THREE

ECHOES OF TAO
IN ABY'S POEMS

ECHOES OF TAO IN ABY

General Introduction

ABY does not write Taoism in Hebrew poetry.

This is brought to show echoes of Taoism in his work, in order to show how close they are and by this to reinforce my assumption that his silence was natural to him as it is natural (even prescribed) in Chinese culture.

There was a good chance that he was exposed.¹ The echoes are like a kindred soul; they reflect his own feelings; his

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1. The Tao Te Ching of Lao Tzu was first introduced in a Latin translation made by Jesuit missionaries in 1788. In 1816 Hegel gave lectures on Taoism at Heidelberg University. Later editions were - 1828, Russian; 1831, French; 1844, German. The first English translation was by a Protestant Missionary, John Chalmers, in 1868. After that there were further translations by the well-known Sinologists, Balfour, Giles and Legge in the last century and many more in this century with new translations appearing the whole time, in fact it is the most translated book in the world next to the Bible: from private correspondence from J.C. Cooper, June 12, 1989.

"He was not a collector, for with all his vast knowledge he kept nothing for himself. He had read everything, yet I never saw him with a book. He himself was the library he did not own. Whatever book we talked about he seemed to have read it long ago. He never tried to conceal his knowledge of it. He didn't boast, he never trotted it out inopportunistly but there it was without fail when the need arose and most amazing of all, no part of it was ever missing." Canetti, Elias : Play of the Eyes. loc. cit. p. 139.

soul. They "talk" to him. In other words, it is within him, in his personality. In his natural disposition, he is near to the eastern way of thinking. As an example, a certain story that he told Leah Goldberg about something in his early life, of a man going to the end of the world, and never arriving there - of going beyond,¹ made a great impression on him. Although this was only a tale, it definitely made a strong impression on him in early life, because he never forgot it; he was an alert, sensitive soul, and he was clearly thinking along these lines himself. This chapter of my work traces the echoes of Taoism in ABY, because of the great possibility that Taoism could have played a part in his life and make-up. A man as sensitive as he was, suffered because of illness and loneliness and loss of his life's work and because he was brilliant,² and had difficulty in relating to the man in the street. When he walked down the street, he did not look to left or right. When he found in Tao the idea that one does not always have to communicate, and the understanding that some things are beyond the normal understanding of things spoken about, it gave him comfort and he did not then see himself as the odd man out. This was as nourishment for his hungering, tortured soul, and so when in Tao, the silence was an accepted thing, the ultimate peace, or tranquillity, it most likely provided him with a solution, which was supposed to guide him

1. Goldberg, Leah, פגישה עם משורר , loc. cit. 1952, p. 25.

2. משה מנדלסון ואהרן מאיר, Mann, Y. loc. cit. p. 114.

towards an inner peace.

There are echoes of Tao through the poems, but in the last two poems, ב ו ד ד י ם א ו מ ר י ם

and אשדד הזורעים ולא יקצורו , we find Tao at its best. In accordance with the principles of Tao, he took upon himself the idea of silence. He was always reserved. A person who writes a poem or two a year is a reserved person and Y. Mann, who knew him well, said he "yearned for silence" even when he was a young boy.¹ He was a kindred soul of Tao to start with, that is why it echoes so deeply - so strongly in his soul; it was like an explosion. The last poem was a declaration of his intention to remain silent. He is telling the world his life's decision. In later years he made people know, for sure, that he would not sign any papers, nor put his name to articles², and he would

1. Mann, Y. loc. cit. p. 117, 114.

2. Goldberg, Leah.

פגישת עם משורר loc. cit. p. 62

לא, לא בשום אופן - אחר - אינני עושה דברים כאלה. לא אפרסם בשמי שום דבר. אם דברי מוצאים חן בעיניך, יכולה את להשתמש בהם כרצונך אבל לא בשמי. and again בשמי לא אפרסם דבר p. 62 Taoist "artists" were not in the custom of signing or selling their works. It was regarded as a prostitution to sell works of art. Art (literature, music) was regarded not as a profession: it was a life. To wish that it may be made known that I was the author is thought of a man not yet adult (Dhammapada). Cooper, J.C. Taoism: The Way of the Mystic. Aquarian Press. Northamptonshire, 1972, p. 94, 98.

not talk in public; and he went into retreat.¹

As long as he did not know Taoism, as a whole, he was wondering, he was experimenting! You can see that it was within him and when he met it, he found in it the solutions to many of his questions - Tao seemed to be the answer for him. It was as if somebody gave him the key to his soul. It could be compared to love at first sight when you feel you have known that person all your life, or in another life perhaps. So when Tao proffers silence - he adopted the idea with great enthusiasm.

The main idea of Tao is the idea of silence, you don't need to talk, you don't have to express aloud; communicating and acting in silence is a fulfilment in itself. It seems that ABY found a solution! Silence.²

1. The Sage lived in close touch and co-operation with nature and though often a solitary or hermit was not necessarily so. Often, like the Hindu 'forest Dwellers', he had served the state, or humanity, in some capacity before retiring to the wild places to live a life of contemplation. His attitude was not world-renouncing, but looking at life and rejecting the artificial and sophisticated in favour of that which is real and of primary importance. It is a question of values. It was a contempt for money and fame, which caused strained and anxious striving, inability to be idle and to be relaxed and enjoy living. It caused fear of loss; barriers interposed, jealousy, competition.
Cooper, J.C. Taoism : The Way of the Mystic. The Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1972, p. 66.
2. "Happy are they who sow" really does indicate a happy reconciliation, and, if it was his swansong, suggests he had passed through an earlier and more doubting phase to total acceptance.
Cooper, J.C. From private correspondence to the writer of this thesis, dated June 26, 1991.

TAOISTIC ECHOES IN THE POEMS

The Chinese painted the same things again and again, but were never repetitive. It was the same with their poetry. We can say the same of ABY's poetry. His poetry is full of the cycles of life, nature, storms, vintage and the fleetingness of life.¹ Most of the objects described are philosophical symbols, symbols of religious thinking, elevated into the spiritual. The pictures of nature give you a picture of man, without mentioning him.

1. These are basic Taoist ideas.

ECHOES OF TAO IN ABY'S POEMS

POEM 1

ההרים שחולבו מטיב לעירי

THE MOUNTAINS GATHERED ROUND MY CITY

As for the mountains gathered round my city,
The secret is hidden away in their wooded flanks
With the stirring restless tree-sea above it,
And the secret lying hidden in their mantling shade.

When vintage came
Noble and gold
It strewed its light round about --
All the footpaths grew bright
While the forest also began to gleam.
Quiet it was and lofty
Its head in the skies
And on its secret
The gently resting light.

i) This is a beautiful impressionistic poem, also mystical and cyclic and seasonal.¹ The mountains loom large in this poem. "Taoist art is concerned mainly with mountain scenery. Landscape painting was called 'mountain' and

1. Chinese poems were a) impressionistic, b) mystical, c) cyclic, d) seasonal.

'water' pictures; (the mountains with their rugged rock walls were regarded as composed of a more subtle substance than the earth of the plains.¹

ii) There is a secret. Tao itself is a secret, unseen, inaudible.² ABY refers to "the secret" five times, in two lines containing six words, which is unusual for ABY.

צפון הסוד ובהביון צלם צפון הסוד

iii) וְיִבֹּא הַבְּצִיר - the grape harvest is at autumn time.³

(iv) All the paths have lit up.⁴

כל המסעולים האירו

1. Cooper, J.C. Taoism - The Way of the Mystic. The Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1972, p. 99.

Levinson, Olga : Adolph Jentsch, Cape Town, 1973, p. 53.

It is interesting that Table Mountain, Cape Town, South Africa is considered one of the seven most energy giving mountains in the world. (Even in the "good old" Chinese days, some mountains were considered to have more energy than the plains.)

2. Yutang, Lin : The Wisdom of Laotse, Michael Joseph, London, 1958, p. 51.

3. Autumn time is approaching the evening of life. Chinese poetry is constantly referring to the transience of life, fallen petals, and falling leaves. "Look upon the life of man, how fast his hours slide by, his seasons fly." Waley Arthur : An Introduction to the study of Chinese painting. Ernest Benn Ltd, London, 1924, p. 132.

4. Tao is referred to as "The Way".

v) הַיַּעַר - the forest is frequently used in Tao and in all Chinese landscape; also trees.

vi) נִיזְרָה אֶת אֲוֵרוֹ מְטַבֵּיב is a gentle sprinkling of the light.

vii) שָׁקֵט הַנָּא וְשֹׁגֵיָא Calm, noble and lofty, great, mighty and sublime, high and exalted.¹

viii) וְרֹאשׁוֹ בַּשָּׁמַיִם .
Its head was in the sky. The forest was proud to have the task of concealing the secret.

ix) וְעַל סִידוֹ/נָה הָאֵוֶר . Repose is important in Tao and suggests a royal dignity.

This poem, הַדְרִים שְׁחוּבְרוֹ מִסְכִּיב לַעֲרִי , is a tranquil poem, calm, restrained and gentle. It started off restlessly, and finds the calm later. One could know that in the Chinese cyclical "way of thinking", calm would emerge from restlessness.²

1. These are royal words and aristocratic. Tao is written about kings, emperors, sages and also ordinary men including the reader.
Laotse in Tao Te Ching speaks of royalty constantly.

2. Chinese people are noted for their tranquility.

"Everything is moving, ever changing, nothing is fixed or permanent in the phenomenal world. There is flux, changing, growing, developing, transitoriness. We shall find this in all the poems, constant moving, never ending, rhythmical movement. Stress is placed on the existential situation".¹

The poem ends

ועל סודו

נח האור

and although man is not mentioned, he is significant (if there is a secret, whose secret is it?).

It is interesting that the first poem in The Way of Life, Lao Tzu, is also about a secret, a secret "and its outward container", which two go together as a pair. "These two come paired but distinct."²

In ABY's poem ההרים שחוברו מסביב לעירי
the shady wooded forest of the mountains hide and contain
the secret.

1. Cooper, J.C. Taoism : The Way of the Mystic, The Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1972, p. 15.

2. Blakney, R.B. The Way of Life : Lao Tzu. (A Mentor Book). New American Library, N.Y. 1955.
"This secret and its containers are separated only by imagination and abstraction. In nature they are invariably paired. This pairing of meaning, or principle, or life with matter is the most profound feature of the world. It is the clue to the understanding of all existence."

ECHOES OF TAO IN ABY'S POEMS

POEM 2

אלול בשדה

AUTUMN IN THE AVENUE

Dreaming lights
Pallid lights
Drooping at my feet.
Tender shadows
Weary shadows
Caress my path.

Amid bare boughs
A gentle breeze
Sounds and sighs
And ceases.
Here a last leaf
Flutters down
Quivering yet a moment
Into
Silence.

This is a dreamy, silent, slowly moving, royal impressionistic picture, and also a cyclic, seasonal poem.¹

1. The entire Tao philosophy is based on cycles. The Way is a movement of Nature; it is an effortless movement, but is nevertheless a movement like the annual rhythm of the seasons.

This is a grey and dreamy poem.¹

One of the Tao poems reads as follows:

"The Way itself is like something
Seen in a dream, elusive, evading one.
In it are images, elusive, evading one.
In it are things like shadows in twilight."²

ABY has a problem of "linear" and "cyclic". He realises that the world is cyclic, and the years are cyclic. Man, maybe, is going one way only. He rebels against this even as a youngster. He does not want to die.

ABY had a very real problem with death. It shows through all his work, and his conversations with Leah, and his description of death; "אֵינִי, אֵינִי וְנִמְוֶה". There was some help available in the form of a belief. The peoples of the east have a very different approach to life and death from the peoples of the west. The peoples of the

1. This is a greyish poem. There are no primary colours. This is the Chinese way. Many shades of grey are used to describe the philosophy behind the perspectives which were philosophical symbols. Space and distance were created by nuances of grey. Levinson Olga, Adolph Jentsch. Human & Rousseau, 1973. p. 68, 71.

2. Blakney, R.B. The Way of Life : Lao Tzu. A New Translation of the Tao Te Ching. New American Library N.Y. 1955, Poem 21, p. 73.

east believe very firmly that individual existence is part of a greater Existence, and therefore, death, as such, is never to be feared. "All undergo perpetual change, perpetual creation."¹

This idea appealed to him.²

This poem, א ל ו ל ב ש ד ר ה , is about the last leaf fluttering down.

The leaf is part of the tree. We as human beings have to think of ourselves as leaves of a tree, as part of the tree, whose life is absorbed into the tree.

1. Cooper, J.C. Taoism, The Way of the Mystic, Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1972, quoting Hovaleque "China".

2. Against a background of Western culture we can clearly appreciate the very different approach to life and death among the peoples of the East. The concept 'life' has a completely different implication; so, too has death. The prevailing Western concept of death is opposed to that of life, whereas the eastern concept of life embraces both simultaneously. The meaning of this may be grasped in the image of the relation between the leaf and the tree: if the little leaf on the big tree were conscious of its own individuality, and limited its vital consciousness to being nothing but a leaf, it would feel its life limited to its own life span. (Death in autumn would mean the destroying of its life and would be antagonistic to its consciousness of life.) But the greater life of the tree "gives birth" to a lesser life of the leaf, surviving it and embracing its death in itself. (Von Durkheim. The Japanese Cult of Tranquility. Rides & Co. London, 1960, p. 15-16.)

Leaves carried by the tree is a frequently used image in ancient Chinese poetry. Cooper, J.C. Taoism, The Way of the Mystic (loc. cit.) p. 88.

Taoist poetry is like the sighing of the wind in the pines, so delicate a sound that one wonders if the whole were a dream. Cooper, J.C. loc. cit. p. 93, 94.

There is royalty in this poem.¹ ABY uses eloquent, gentle language and enhances whatever he describes. He writes with restraint.

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1. "Everything in the universe takes its greatness from Tao (could be God), and of this the king is the human symbol. He is the man, who, through the earth and heavens connects all of us with the way." Blakney, R.B. Mentor Books, New American Library, 1955, N.Y. p. 77.

He does not use an everyday word like עֲלֵפִים .
He uses a Biblical word פְּאֲרוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם .

ECHOES OF TAO IN ABY'S POEMS

POEM 3

לֹא יָדַעְתִּי מִמֶּנִּי

I NEVER KNEW

In these vintage days and many-moving skies
When earth darts her light-rays from within
And wasted wide-winged clouds
Are swept afar by tempest -
Then from the green-black forest your lonely
House emerges doubly pallid,
As it calls me with its windows:
Here my heart may hide away
From the storm.

And when you sit like this before the fire
And its gold sparkles
On your bent and chestnut head
The light flows along your fingers
And the radiance of the flame
Dances in the mirror of your black and silken dress.
Apples grow in silence on your table
The plentiful and aureate grapes overflow the basket rim
And blessing offers all its ample fragrance.

The forest thunders and it roars
A song that is sweet
Heard in your silent
Precious corner.

You and I -
And over us
The surge of seas.
Hidden are we
Like two pearls
Within their tissues
On the sea-bed.

I never knew my own soul and desire
Yet my soul drank its fill of the silence.
See: The wings of my spirit quiver.

Let the forest thunder, let it roar,
Let the wind-waves beat and crash
While on me rests your tremulous gaze.
Aye, you are blessing
You are all rest -
When at my very soul the tempest shrieked.

Hark: Mighty waves are surging in the forest,
Summoned is the earth and all its fullness.
The world has stripped its whole soul bare
Before the Lord in the tempest.

In this poem, we are a little suspicious of the fact that this may be a romantic poem, since it is the only romantic poem of ABY's. It could have another reading, the reading of a close relationship between the intellect, and the soul.

In Tao, all art, as with the work of the scholar, was necessarily intellectual, rather than emotional, and poetry also contained little of the love elements, compared with other subjects, and none of the passional.¹

Considering ABY's knowledge of the Bible, it is more likely that he would write a "love-poem" to the soul (than to a "flesh and blood" woman), as in Song of Songs.

The duality in this poem could be Yang and Yin,² which create one whole, the man and the woman, but is more likely the intellect, the more masculine part, and the soul, within, the "passive" eternally creative female part.³

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1. Cooper, J.C. Taoism : The Way of the Mystic, Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1972, p. 101.
 2. See Appendix. Yin & Yang is the basis of Tao. They are interchanging opposites, which form a whole, and on which the entire universe and everything in it, is constructed.
 3. Cooper, J.C. The Way of the Mystic, Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1972, p. 28.

The many-moving skies are a Chinese picture constantly occurring in Chinese art or poetry.¹

The house calls me with its windows. "House and windows"² are frequent symbols in Tao, the reason being that the "empty space" in the house is also interpreted as the female passive creative void within, just as the soul is within.³

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1. Levinson Olga : Adolph Jentsch, Human and Rousseau, Cape Town, 1973, Cape Town, 1973. p. 5.
"The spatial-temporal landscapes, with their huge skies, sometimes two-thirds of the canvas, which seem to signify man lost in the infinity of time."
 2. "The world may be known
Without leaving the house;
The Way may be seen;
Apart from the windows."
Lau, D.C. Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Penguin Books, Middlesex, England, 1963, Poem XLVII, p. 108.
Blakney, R.B. A Mentor Book, New American Library, N.Y. 1955, p. 47.
 3. "Cut out windows and doors
In the house as you build
But the use of the house
Will depend on the space
In the walls that is void"
Hughes Catharine. Shadow and Substance : A Crossroad Book. The Seabury Press, New York, 1974, (no pages).

In the second verse, there is the male and the female. There is light and black. Mirror is a Chinese image. Silk is a Chinese image. Apples are a symbol of peace. The basket was a magic implement to sweep away evil. In ancient Chinese times, there was an altar for healing spirits, on it were basket offerings of fragrant flowers and ripe fruits.¹ Pearls were a well-known Chinese symbol.²

The poem describes the purifying, purging catharsis which follows the storm.

וְזַעַקָה קָאָרֶץ וּמִלָּאָה
אֵת כָּל נִפְשׁוֹ הָעוֹלָם הָעֶרְבָה
לְשִׁמְחָה אֶת־נִי בַּסְעֶרָה

This is the Chinese philosophy, metaphysical changes in Man and Nature. The catharsis of the storm leads to a creative re-birth.

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1. Children play basket games today, in China.
 2. "It may be that the poem has a yin-yang balance symbol with the yin waters and pearls and the yang skies and fire. Gold is yang, black is yin. The tempest yang, repose is yin and so on."

From private correspondence of the author, Cooper, J.C., authority on Tao, to the writer of this thesis, 4th July 1989.

This poem is called לא ידעתי , "I didn't know myself", Tao says.

"It is wisdom to know others;
It is enlightenment to know oneself."¹

1. Hughes Catharine: Shadows and Substance. A Crossroad Book, The Seabury Press, New York, 1974. No page.

ECHOES OF TAO IN ABY'S POEMS

POEM 4

מלכות

ROYALTY

Day flickers and dies in my diadem
The gold sits heavy on my brow
The train of my robe sweeps the marble stairs
How the sea moans in a splendour of evening grief.

Daughter of night, be silent as you come
Sit at my feet upon the white of marble
Let the wind gently lift your hair
Your hair so black.
See the waters swell -
Be seated still
Till I bid you: Rise and sing!

In the Taoist cosmos of eternal change the Five Elements, wood, fire, earth, metal and water are also connected with symbols of direction, colour, season, sound, climate, etc.¹

1. Water, as in מַלְכּוּת , could be connected with cold from the north.

1. Legeza Lazlo. Tao Magic. Thames and Hudson, London, 1975, p. 11.

2. Winter.
3. Black.
4. Sound of groaning.
5. The virtue of wisdom
6. The emotion of fear.¹

This poem is pervaded with royalty, the title, the crown, the gold, the robe, the marble stairs, a splendour of grief, the gentility.²

There is death here, the death of Venice - death and the momentariness of life is a Chinese preoccupation of mind.³

The wisdom of the "creative compassionate mother", "daughter-of-the-night", הַלַּיְלָה allows for a calm, for

1. Legeza Lazlo, Tao Magic, Thames and Hudson, London, 1975, p. 11.

2. This could be royalty with which Tao is imbued. Laotse speaks of the "king" and the "emperor" constantly.

3. הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה - day "flickers".
The Taoist "key" shown on p. would show that water is connected with a) black, b) winter cold from the north, c) the sound of groaning

מִן הַיָּם הַיָּם הַיָּם הַיָּם
וְהַיָּם הַיָּם הַיָּם הַיָּם

and fear, (viz the anxiety of the water rising, perhaps Venice sinking), and d) also wisdom.

hope.¹

The black hair is part of the water.²

ושערך הן שחור

Water is also a symbol of reflection, and upon reflection things might come right.³ He bids the "daughter of night" to sit and wait till he bids her sing. The Chinese would not offer resistance - they would "relax on" the difficulties, knowing that everything goes in cycles.⁴

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1. Venice, ה ל ל - ב ת , could be the deep-rooted Yin mother aspect, representing mercy and wisdom; the yang, the father aspect is justice and method and the power of the Sun. Cooper, J.C. Taoism : The Way of the Mystic, Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1972, p. 29.

The ה ל ל ב ת could be the mystic female; passive, silent, (creator of all things), from whom the heavens and the earth originate, constantly, continuously enduring always. Blakney, R.B. The Way of Life, A Mentor book. New American Library, N.Y. 1955, p. 52, footnote p. 59, p. 129.

2. Black is a symbol of water.
3. This poem enables man's nature to be held in the Yin-Yang balance of intellect and feeling.
4. Note the line from a poem of a contemporary of Li Po's a famous ancient Chinese poet. "A solitary city sinks in the milky mist." Cooper, J.C. Taoism : The Way of the Mystic, Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1972, p. 103.

ECHOES OF TAO IN ABY'S POEMS

POEM 5

לילות כי ילבינו

WHEN THE NIGHTS ARE WHITE

In these white nights of dream
Dreamt by a weary world
Time grown still may hearken to its own pulse
While fountains sound and sing
Their song of self.

And past and future comes to terms
While present is tranquil eternities.
Within the stillness of your life
The stars are hushed
As out of eternities there blows a breeze
And your eyes grow wide.

The tranquility of this poem suggests the Eastern way of thinking, as opposed to the West.¹ We who live in Time cannot understand Timelessness. Time is static. It is we

1. See Chap 1 entitled Tranquility in the East and the West. "The Japanese Cult of Tranquility" by Von Durkheim, Graf, Rider and Co, London, 1960.

who move.¹

This poem is as if written by an old man. ABY wrote poems of a "growing-old" nature even when he was young.² In ancient China, white ("White Nights of Dream") represents west (on the compass), west where the sun finally sets.³

-
1. It is as though Time were the fair, open countryside of the Mind of G-d, and the G-d stream of our eternal life is a river. The river moves across the landscape of time, bearing within itself the hither and thithering life of a myriad individuals. The river is the ever widening G-d stream of progressing life. The still landscape across which it moves is Time. (Armido : The Wisdom of the Spirit, Hawthorne Press, London, 1943, p. 79, 80.)
 2. Karl Jaspers says reality reveals itself when man's existence enters a final phase of consciousness in which time and eternity coincide. The Tao says: Man has a real duration, but it has nothing to do with beginning or end in time. This transiency of human life, is a typically oriental thought found everywhere in Eastern writings from the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam to the I Ching in China.
"Nur ein auge blik kann alles Sein". Only for a moment can existence be (Oxford Companion to German Literature (Henry & Mary Garland, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1976. See Jasper's Karl. (Prof. of Psychology and Philosophy at Heidelberg University.)
 3. Legeza Laszlo : Tao Magic. Thames and Hudson, 1975, p. 11, 27.

Note that ABY often talks of west, or sunset or evening, as the autumn of one's life.

ECHOES OF TAO IN ABY'S POEMS

POEM 6

הורף בהיר

BRIGHT WINTER

The world is pure and hard and white.
Yesterday the North Wind drove away
The blind and endlessly
Straying mist of dreams -
The wind holds day pent with its breath.
Snow shimmers all around
And the blue-shadowed mountains
The pallid-blue skies
Quiver by their light.
While in the shadow
Caught grandly frozen
Stretches the river
Dull-emerald ice
With radiant snows
Until its greenish winding
Trail is lost
Far away yonder.

There day's light flares
With flamelets glowing
As though a sun fallen
On shapeless ice-blocks
Hard as crystal
Were broken small.

Let me close my eyes.
For my blood sings within me
With a ringing in my ears:
The world is pure.

It seems to me:
Together with the heart of the earth
Within me throbs my heart
As it flows with currents
Streaming under the gelid ice.

The world is pure,
Is pure.

This poem is an exquisite impressionistic "picture" of a winter scene.

This poem can only really be fully appreciated if we know that "evening snow on a lake", a Chinese symbol, would

refer to "old age",¹ and that the North wind involves a cold winter (yin) and also indicates fear.²

The wind (or the Divine Spirit) keeps the day away. The river, יָרֵךְ יָרֵךְ,³ iced up, stretches we don't know where, yonder⁴.

In the poem the world is described as pure.⁵

And his heart beats with the heart of the world.

יָחַד עִם לֵב הָאָרֶץ
כִּי לִבִּי יִהְיֶה

and he feels good because the world is so pure.⁶

1. Levinson Olga : Adolph Jentsch, Human and Rousseau, 1973, p. 68.
2. Legeza Laszlo, Tao Magic Thames and Hudson, London, 1975, p. 11.
3. In הַדְּמִיּוֹת שֶׁחֹבְרִין מִסְבִּיב לַעֲדִי we have יִדְעָק שְׁחֹר
(Not primary colours)
4. Like the path in אֶל לֹךְ בְּשֹׁדֶר הַ, stretches
yonder - goes beyond.
5. In ancient Chinese lore, purity goes with simplicity and youth: he is feeling younger again.
6. The Sage prizes essential purity. Therefore simplicity is the denomination of that in which there is no admixture; purity of that in which the spirit is not impaired. It is he who can embody simplicity and purity whom we call the true Man. (Hughes Catharine : Shadow and Substance) (quoting Chuang Tzu). A Crossroad Book, The Seabury Press, N.Y. 1974. (No page no's).

This poem is directly connected with Chinese symbolism. The paradox of abstract and concrete runs all the way through this poem (opposites) (Yin and Yang).

White snow on the lake in the evening is a spiritual symbol for old age; from the north comes the cold and creeps towards you! There is frost, and it is icy cold. The poet, a young man of 19, writes to tell us he saw something unique, a beautiful winter landscape. He describes certain feelings, echoes of something he knew, something he identified with, but could not quite explain - man in the winter of his life.

These are two sentiments, one, you look around you, it is cold; two he is expressing a feeling, contemplating and then suddenly, the young man takes over, the warm blooded young man, fully alive, and his blood starts singing within him, and he flows with the currents under the ice, now not seeing the "icing up" and frosting up that he saw at first. He doesn't feel the cold; he is young.

So, although this poem is about old age, it is really about youth, how glorious youth is, and pure. As we know, ABY constantly wrote about old age, even from youth; this is a favourite Chinese theme. Even if he were not aware of the Chinese philosophy, it echoed in his heart, and he could write about it, until he met up with it, and then, when he did meet up with it, he did not only write about it,

but he could live it, and did, in fact, live it. It rang in his heart like a new-found but recognized well-loved bar of music, something he had always known, a newborn love.

When ABY found Tao, he felt it was like putting a name to what he always knew. He just did not know how to explain it. He did not know about it before, but when somebody put a name to it, it was like an instinct that you can't quite explain. When he read about the features of the Chinese philosophy, he could strongly identify, because it made so strong an impression on him; obviously it found an echo in his heart.

ECHOES OF TAO IN ABY'S POEMS

POEM 7

מזמור

PSALM

At very rare moments you sometimes raise
Your soul within you like a crystal drop:
The world is filled with sun and broken tints
A gathering of sights and quivering things
And your eyes are on your world
As on the crystal drop.
And you, your world so quivers to pour forth
And not stay full
And trembles every where and every way.
Yet you are dedicate to all the worlds,
From your eyes flow the bounds of airy distance
And deep within them lurk the horrors of the dark
While if things near and far should meet with you
They require your soul.

When nights are still
Go stand on mountain peaks
And set your head amid the great cold stars.
Down to the ground sinks all the life below
And on its ultimate distressful glow
The black forgetfulness descends.

But you are wake to terrors
Above the darkness.
If a star should fall
Trembling at the fiery roar that mounts
Aloft to heaven from Abaddon's lost,
It falls in your soul
To be quenched in its abyss.

And when the morning comes
You find yourself hovering over the face of the abyss
To hammer out your depth of heaven upon it
While the vast sun is in your hands
Until the evening.

This poem is Taoist, in its paradoxes. Taoism believes that life has good and bad, and we must adjust.¹

This is a cycle poem. At midnight there is a turning of the cycle. The one stanza is about the night, and the next about the morning, and there are cycles in the poet's moods too. He wants to put his head amongst the stars, because each one of us is a star, כִּי כָּכָה , but the place of the stars is not a happy place, and the earth is hardly better.

1. To adjust oneself to events and surroundings casually is the way of Tao. Yutang Lin : The Wisdom of Laotse, Michael Joseph, p. 84.

"The crystal drop",

אגל בידן

1

features as an important focal point in the poem; it contains everything, the good, the bad, the beautiful, the frightening.²

In the Far East, the ancient Chinese understood the sacred powers of crystals. Both the Japanese and the Chinese have long considered balls of the purest crystal to be talismans aiding contemplation, and venerated them for that purpose.³

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1. Crystals, coming as they do from the mineral kingdom, give us a sense of connection with many levels of life force. Harold Edmund : Crystal Healing, Aquarian Press Northamptonshire, 1987 (Foreword) (Life force is the breath of life within us and within the universe.)
 2. "... each age has its changes and transformations. Misery and happiness regularly alternate. . Hughes Catharine. Shadow & Substance, A Crossroad Book : The Seabury Press, Seabury, N.Y. (Quoting Chuang Tzu) No pages).
 3. Quartz crystals themselves have a polarity; they project an electro-magnetic energy. They have a magnet field connected with the magnetic centre of the universe. Harold Edmund : Crystal Healing, 1987, p. 11, 14, 15.

J. Cooper says, "The outward charm of Taoist art holds a profound inner meaning, it leads beyond appearances and keeps the spirit from the limitations of the senses, so that man is not confined to the solid, mundane view, but is placed in an elevated position from which he can see over valleys and hilltops to the distances beyond, which makes possible a subtle penetration of nature."¹

This poem has what J. Cooper refers to as the stop-short and sting-in-the-tail,² which are frequently used in Chinese poetry.

"While the vast sun is in your hands
Until the evening."

This poem, and all ABY's poems are not simply Nature poems, or soul poems, or a picture of a microcosm in a macrocosm, (the "echo of the big world"), but they are what J. Cooper calls "mysticism made visible".³

The art of the Chinese poet like life, had to be a moving, flowing thing, it was no static perfection of form, but a

1. Cooper, J.C. Taoism : The Way of the Mystic, Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire 1972, p. 96.

2. op. cit.

3. op. cit.

response, and everything is conveyed by suggestion, inference or metaphor or simply empty space. In this way the onlooker is drawn in and makes him one with the rhythms of nature and the inner world.¹

The flowing, rhythmic quality of Taoist art also inferred the ever-changing and transitory nature of the world, the impermanence of any moods or circumstances.

1. Cooper, J.C. Taoism : The Way of the Mystic, Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1972, p. 94.

ECHOES OF TAO IN ABY'S POEMS

POEM 8

כנטות היום

AS DAY DECLINES

While the red beacons of our life die down
Let us take from off our brow the festal wreath
With its weary leaves and withered rose-petals falling
And then all silent go down to the streams.

As day declines let us stand on their shores
With eyes that follow them as on they course
Forsaken yet infinitely proud in their isolation.

And in the reddish flow of twilight
We gaze and startled see the blossoms come
White blossoms
Borne daintily along upon the waters
From the garden coign whence they were laughingly
Swept away at noon.

And then we know our youth has passed before our eyes
And while the memory sweetens our souls at eventide
The shades of evening grief loom blackly overhead.

And yet on high star after star comes striding over
mountains

With a vast strange night coming down on us

And the evening breeze that touches us

Throbbing and moaning as though upon black violins.

"In the East, the lotus, in the west, the rose is the
flower that was in the Beginning ... that wherein existence
comes to be and passes away."¹

In this poem white blossoms are a focal point. We can see
from Legeza's book² that "white" relates to "west".

This poem consists of a metaphysical funeral procession.³

In this poem, in the stately funeral procession, the
participants are all from nature, and they go down to the
eternal rivers together, with a knowing submission to human
destiny.

In this poem of the universe, man is hardly mentioned.
Man's smallness contrasts vividly with the hugeness of
Nature, which is a main theme in Chinese culture.

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1. Cooper, J.C. Yin and Yang, Aquarian Press,
Northamptonshire, 1972, p. 53.
 2. Legeza Lazlio : Tao Magic : The Secret Language of
Diagrams and Calligraphy, Thames & Hudson, London,
1975, p. 11.
 3. Jonathan Nathan, 80, 81, 1985, בצרון, פרידה על 'כנסות היום'.

ECHOES OF TAO IN ABY'S POEMS

POEM 9

בלילה יעבור סער

THE STORMWIND

At night the stormwind crosses the black of your land
Assaulting forests tall and strong and dripping-leaved
And warms the long slow sighing of the fields
And strips the rivers bare and beats their nakedness
Till vapours rise from them.

Upon this night
It presses panting, groaning by your walls,
Then starts and flees forestward
But fleetly, lightly comes back piping shrill,
Beating your door and bursting into your attic,
Its howling laughter snatching you from arms of
feverish dream
Its chill flight touching on your glowing brow.
Then on it flies and as it flies it howls.

And so you lie
Heavy lost body, soul flickering (up and down)
As you listen, listen hard
Open-eyed and night-caught.

Until a young and pale-faced day arrives
To gaze deep in the world with wondering eyes
And for this your unhappy longings yearn
While you quiver
Without knowing your own desire
- Spring having passed you by
This night with the passing of the storm.

The poet paints human passion against a background of storm. The human feeling recorded in the poem is prefaced by the description of a parallel manifestation in nature.¹

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1. "This tendency to bring human things into relation with Nature, common enough in primitive literature, survived as one of the most prominent characteristics of developed art and poetry in China."

Waley Arthur: An Introduction to the study of Chinese Painting, Ernest Benn Ltd, London, 1923, p. 15.

ECHOES OF TAO IN ABY

POEM 10

כחיים אורח

SOME FEW WHO SAY ...

Day leaves a flickering sun behind for coming day
While night laments for night
And Summer follows Summer as the leaves are swept away
And the world sings once again of all its pain and
plight.

Tomorrow we shall die, no utterance be with us
And as at starting out shall face a closing gate.
But when the heart is glad 'tis God who brought us
close
And then repented, fearing some treachery of fate.

Day bears a flaring sun to coming day
Night after night pours forth its stars in turn.
On few lips song is poised, held poised to stay.
On seven paths we part, and by one we return.

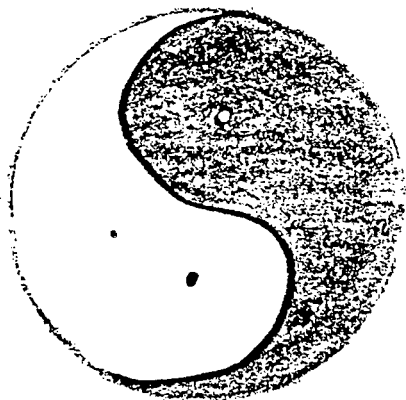
This poem deals with opposites, the yin and the yang, (the

white with the black dot);¹ (yet with a continuity which one day carries forth to another).

On the lips of the lonely ones, or "alone ones", (of the few) song is stopped. The "alone ones" are proud to be alone. The "alone ones" believe in silence. When we are born, every one has different ideas, and not every one necessarily believes in silence, but when we go back to the One, silence wins the day. The last verse explains the first verse; it says the world is happy (or singing) despite its unhappiness, despite the sadness of the

שֶׁמֶשׁ דּוֹעָכָה , and he says tomorrow we'll go, and we'll not talk anymore or sing, and despite an uncontrollable feeling of slight anxiety, we'll be happy.

1.



The yin-yang diagram shows the two great forces of the universe, the dark and light, negative and positive, female and male, to be held in complete balance and equality of power; together they hold everything in the realm of manifestation. There is a point, or embryo of black in the white and white in the black. This is not fortuitous, but essential to the symbolism, since there is no being which does not contain within itself the germ of its opposite.

Cooper, J.C. Taoism : The Way of the Mystic. Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1972, p. 26, 27.

At the beginning he says few are saying ... he is going to tell us what the few are saying, but suddenly song is stopped on their lips! How then will he tell us what the few are saying?

It is very strange; the world rejoices, but with the "few" the **שִׁירָה נִעְצָרָה**, the song is stopped; only these few are actually stopping singing; the others are singing at sunset and singing at sunrise.

The few are different, the unique few; the few actually indicate that they are different, and they choose it.

עַל שְׁמֵי הַיְּדִידִים שִׁירָה נִעְצָרָה

By their silence they are making a declaration. They are saying something to us. They are telling us of the importance of silence. Their silence means something. He doesn't say what. He just says that few are saying, everybody joins together and comes together, bad times or good times and they are all singing.

Basically we are only quiet when we die. He thinks, according to the name of the poem, these few who declare silence, are the ones who are really saying something. In their choice of silence, they are deliberately "letting" us know what they want to tell us. And this might explain his preparation for his big silence. He is giving a hint of

Concerning Emerson's essays, "Circles" and "The Oversoul", Lin Yutang remarks that: one appreciates the essays better after reading Laotse, i.e. after we get to understand Tao better.¹

If we read Laotse and become more familiar with Tao philosophy, we shall certainly appreciate ABY more.

In ㄇ'ㄣ'ㄣ'ㄣ'ㄣ'ㄣ' , ABY reflects and contemplates, and it is here that ABY comes nearer to his goal, that is of his ego aligning itself with the universal principles of cosmic understanding, and coming nearer to attaining to union with the universe and thereby of some degree of peace.

This is a cyclical poem. Encompassed by the cosmic cycle, the speaker and his silent companions know that they are about to return to their source. (The cyclic movement is one of renewal, of infinitude, revolution, change, movement with endless possibilities, but also with the symbolism of

1. Yutang Lin. The wisdom of Laotse. Michael Joseph London, 1948, p. 28. Allen & Unwin, London, 1952. Also, "Vedanta for Modern Man". Edited by Isherwood Christopher, in an article Emerson and the East by Ferrando Guido, p. 319-324.

cosmic completion.)¹

Cyclical time takes the emphasis off individualism and places it on the cosmic. The plural use of the word could be speaking of all the "alone" ones of the universe. The poet could be speaking for most of mankind. The two arts, painting and poetry are not only related, but identical as far as their ultimate functions are concerned. The function of both painting and poetry is none other than to express human sentiments of joy and sorrow, happiness and anger, and feelings of peace, nobility, pride in solitude, and to uplift.

Their purpose is to refine the feelings, stimulate the mind, and create a mood so that when the reader or onlooker comes out of it, he becomes a nobler soul, a loftier spirit ... in short, a better human being. There is no subordination of man to nature; neither is there escape

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1. There is an objective connection between the various forms of life. Rebirth is a law of nature. Saher P.J. Eastern Wisdom and Western Thought, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1969, p. 284.

"There is a dynamic conception of nature and the universe, not 'natura naturata but 'natura naturans'. Creation is not a given fact but a constantly recurring phenomenon." Saher, P.J. Eastern Wisdom and Western Thought, George Allen and Unwin, Ltd. London, 1969, p. 284,285.

from the human world.¹

Loneliness or aloneness is a source of pride in Chinese culture. In Tao, kings and princes in speaking of themselves use the terms lonely, alone, friendless of small account,² "a going out of the spirit into solitude, unafraid and exulting".³

Some choose loneliness: "alone as if adrift on the lonely sea".⁴

This poem is flooded with silence and loneliness. The few lonely ones or "alone ones" are proud of their "aloneness". In this way they become unified with the cosmic sense of time. Past and present and future become one in the eternal silent space of time.

1. Radhakrishnn, P.T. Rau. The Concept of Man, Allen & Unwin, London, 1960, p. 160.

2. Blakney, R.B. The Way of Life : Lao Tzu. A Mentor Book, New American Library, N.Y. p. 92, poem 39.

3. Cooper, J.C. Taoism : The Way of the Mystic, The Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1972, p. 93. Quoting Binyon, L. "Chinese Art", published by B.T. Batsford.

"Lonely though I am, and unlike other men, yet I revere the Foster Mother, Tao". Giles Lionel, The Sayings of Lao Tzu. J. Murray, London, 1905.

4. Chinese saying.

ECHOES OF TAO IN ABY'S POEMS

POEM 11

HAPPY ARE THEY WHO SOW ...

Happy are they who sow but do not reap
For they shall wander afar.

Happy the large of heart whose glorious youth
Added to the daylight and its largesse
Though they have shed their trappings at the wayside.

Happy the proud whose pride exceeds the frontiers of
their soul
And grows into the humility of whiteness
After the rainbow rises in the cloud.

Happy are they who know what their heart cries
In the wilderness
And on their lips the silence comes to bloom.

Happy are they for they will be gathered
Into the heart of the world
Swathed in the mantle of the unremembered
As their constant wordless portion.

It would seem that ABY was planning for this moment of renouncing for a long time even though subconsciously. This renouncing is a confession.

Perhaps he was thinking about the meaning of life and its purpose. Perhaps he had the desire to know what the greater self was about, 'א ל' א' נ' י' 'פ' ש' . To try to know one's greater self, it seems one has to give up some of one's ego. "Renounce we must, and through renunciation gain - that is the truth of the inner world".¹

He was a man of silence all his days.² He started off silent in his soul, from his youth, worked through the different aspects of silence, and returned to it, in a committed way, in 1925, the special "place" he had never left.

This moment of decision was a very crucial moment,³ and

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1. Tagore Rabindranath : The Religion of Man, Unwin Books, London, 1931, p. 123.
In our soul we are conscious of the transcendental truth in us, the Universe, the Supreme Man; and this soul, the Spiritual Self, has its enjoyment in the renunciation of the individual self for the sake of the Supreme soul. This renunciation is not in the negation of self, but in the dedication of it. This purpose is in the realization of its unity with some objective ideal of perfections, some harmony of relationship between the individual and the infinite man. (Tagore Rabindranath, The Religion of Man. Unwin Books, London, 1961, p. 112.)
 2. Yitzchak Mann has told us this time and time again in an article אברהם בן יצחק, אורלוגין, ספרית פועלים, מרחביה, 8 May 1953, p. 113-120. See particularly p. 119.
 3. "Every moment contains the fullness of all moments: out of the darkness of one moment grows the light of another moment: the alchemy of the moment is happening. Each moment is vital because it affects the whole." Kent Corita, Introduction by Norman Cousins, Beacon Press, Massachusetts 1982. Pages un-numbered.

as we can see today, the energy of that moment spread beyond all boundaries. This was a moment of decision hard and fast. In a moment of such incisive decision, perhaps after years of calculated contemplation, a person would be involved with all his being and would reflect that experience in his declaration of that decision.¹

The time had now come when ABY had firmly made up his mind to give up writing as an artistic expression. It must have taken deep soul-searching and been a wrench for him. This was his swansong. It would not be a light and easy matter.²

In separate chapters we have stated how and why ABY's thinking could be along Taoistic lines.

Leah said he was a strong, proud personality. Part of his personality was that he did not open readily. People were afraid of him because they didn't know his secrets. By

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1. In our soul we are conscious of the transcendental truth in us, the Universe, the Supreme Man; and this soul, the Spiritual Self, has its enjoyment in the renunciation of the individual self for the sake of the Supreme soul. This renunciation is not in the negation of self, but in the dedication of it. This purpose is in the realization of its unity with some objective ideal of perfections, some harmony of relationship between the individual and the infinite man. (Tagore Rabindranath, *The Religion of Man*. Unwin Books, London, 1961, p. 112.)
 2. A poet exists as a poet by expressing his experience ... one thing is certain, the experience itself will be incommunicable. The skill of the poet is to make out of language and the effects of language, a reliable symbol of his experience. Abercrombie, Lancelles Abercrombie, "The Idea of Great Poetry", Martin Secker, London, 1925, p. 223.

going into himself it gave him a sense of strength.¹

The poem starts

אני הולכים ולא מקדים

Not to seek reward is an eastern concept.² They do not seek reward but choose to sink into silence and oblivion and become unified with the cosmos. "For they shall wander afar."³

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1. Maybe one has a feeling that one may not manage to do the things that one wants to do because of time or a disability or some other reason - but it also gives one a sense of power in not telling the world what one really has. It makes one feel strong not to reveal it.
 2. Sivananda Swami, Swimad Bhagavad Gita, Divine Life Society, Durban, S.A. 1939, p. 126.
Neither let your motive be the fruit of action. Cooper, J.C. Yin and Yang, Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1975, p. 95.
Tao speaks of "the uncarved block" i.e. pure and desireless. Lau, D.C. Lao Tzu. Tao Te Ching, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1963, Poem LVII, p. 118.
 3. "For they shall wander afar." Line 2
Laotse says:
"Outgoing, far-reaching, (Poem 25)
Also: All things work together:
I have watched them reverting
And have seen how they flourish
And return again, each to his roots.
This, I say, is the stillness:
A retreat to one's roots:
Or better yet, return
To the will of G-d. (Poem 16) p. 68 - Blakney
R.B. The Way of Life Lao Tzu, A Mentor Book, New American Library, N.Y. 1955, p. 77, 68.
Also: "Everything comes into existence, but observe, returns to its source, ...
Returning to the source is serenity;
It is to realise one's destiny". MacHovec,
Frank, J. The Book of Tao. The Peter Pauper Press, N.Y. 1962, p. 24.
Also "Turning back is how the Way moves". Poem 40. Lau D.C. Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Penguin Books, England, 1967, p. 101.

In Taoism "wandering far" implies "return".

As even T.S. Eliot, a "westerner" said "It is necessary to go a long way through many difficulties to find a place one has never left".

They, the happy ones, have given joy and light to the world, by casting off their youthful possessions¹ (including their poetry) to those who desired it, at the cross-roads,² at the milestone where a decision must be made of choice of road.

והם את עולם המסע על אם הדרך

In the third verse, pride and modesty³ reflect each other.⁴

If a quality of a thing has developed to its highest pitch, then that quality inevitably changes and becomes the

1. "I would not leave this main path, so easily followed, but many people prefer the by-paths." MacHovec Frank, J. The Book of Tao. The Peter Pauper Press, N.Y. 1962, p. 48.

2. אֵם הַדֶּרֶךְ ים , at the crossroads, could be the mother of the ways, the matrix, the Absolute source to which one returns.

3. "The wise wear common clothes and jewels in their hearts", Blakney R.B. The Way of Life, Lao Tzu. A Mentor Book, New American Library, N.Y. 1955. p. 70. Also MacHovec. The Book of Tao, Peter Pauper Press, N.Y. 1962, p. 31. No 70.

4. "Fame or self: which is more important, wealth or self: which is more valuable?" MacHovec Frank J. The Book of Tao, The Peter Pauper Press, N.Y. 1962, poem 70. Also, MacHovec, "which is dearer, fame or self?" Blakney, R.B. The Way of the Lao Tzu. A Mentor Book. New American Library, 1955, 97, Poem 44.

opposite - a complete reversing.

The verse says:

אֲשֶׁר הַגָּאִים אֶת גִּבּוֹרָתָם עָבְרוּ גְבוּלֵי נַפְשָׁם
וְהָיָה כַּעֲנוּת הַלֵּב

Happy are the proud ones whose pride passed the border of their souls, and became as the modesty of the whiteness after the passing of the rainbow in the cloud. (The sum of the colours of the rainbow is white - the purity of white.) (Pride, modesty and humility and purity go together.)¹

With their perpetual interaction, the qualities give rise to their opposites.²

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1. Humility is amongst the most mentioned essential qualities in Taoism. "The most important and characteristic teaching of Laotse is of non-contention, humility, gentility and seeking the lowly position, of which water is the symbol. Laotse had more passages on teachings of this kind than on any other topic." Yutang Lin : The Wisdom of Laotse, Michael Joseph, London, 1958, p. 82.
"Be one with humble dust,
This is the mystic unity".
MacHovec Frank J. The Book of Tao. The Peter Pauper Press, N.Y. 1962, poem 56, p. 11.
 2. "The truly wise are content to be last; they are therefore first; they are indifferent to themselves".
MacHovec Frank J. The Book of Tao, The Peter Pauper Press, N.Y. 1962, Poem 7, p. 47.
Humility and pride go together.
"If you would contract, you must first expand." Giles Lionel : Sayings of Lao Tzu, John Murray, London, 1905, Poem 36.
Also
"If you would have a thing shrink
You must first stretch it;
If you would have a thing weakened,
You must first strengthen it".
Lau, D.C. Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Penguin Books, Middlesex, England, 1963, Poem XXXVI, p. 95.

The fourth verse says:

אֲשֶׁר הִיוּעִים אֵלַי יָקָרָה לִּפְנֵי מַעֲדָנִי
וְעַל שִׁפְטֵי הַפֶּה הַזֶּה הִרְוִיחָהּ

Happy are those who know their heart calls them from the wilderness (a spiritual place) e.g. Moses in the Wilderness with the Children of Israel) and on their lips blossoms silence. (Silence blossoms as a flower, which is grown from seed.)¹ This is a cycle of growth, in this case, of silence. The seed was never reaped, but a wonderful "flower" of silence comes up in the wilderness.²

This seems to have been the height of perfection in ABY's eyes. A blossoming is a fruitful and joyful occurrence, particularly in the wilderness.

Silence is a joyful thing;³ it brings you peace and

1. Laotse says when "they" have reached their bloom, each returns to its origin; and returning to their origin is rest or fulfillment of destiny. Giles Lionel: The Sayings of Lao Tzu (John Murray, London, 1905).

2. This is a two-fold allusion to silence:
i) the wilderness is itself, a silent place, and
ii) The prophets went into the desert to seek the silence of concentration and wisdom - revelation.

3. Silence in the Taoist hermit's meditation was recognized as a way of communication. He goes to communicate with Nature.

tranquillity.¹

The last verse speaks of those who are gathered into the heart of the world, (*תְּהוֹמֵי הָאָרֶץ* is used for "death"), They are wrapped in the mantle of forgetting (without cares) and their law is permanent silence. Perhaps one can give the most by remaining passively in the background. Tao "believes" in that; Tao also believes that birth, from the feminine principle, results in death and in turn, gives rise to new life.

וְהָיָה חֵקֶם הַחֲסִיד בְּלִי אֵמֶר

2

In the two poems, *בְּוִדְדִים אֶרְמֵי* and *אֶשְׁרֵי הַזֹּרְעִים וְלֹא יִקְצֹרֵר*, ABY gives his confession, his *וְדָרִי* mentioned to Leah Goldberg, which she mentions in her poem to him (loc. cit.).

1a) "Those who know, do not speak" occurs in every Taoist book. Legeza Laszlo : Tao Magic, Thames and Hudson, London, 1975, p. 30.

b) The Sage imparts knowledge by example. Cooper, J.C. Taoism : The Way of the Mystic, Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1972, p. 68.

2. "Everything comes into existence, but returns to its source. Returning to the source is serenity, it is to realise one's destiny. To realise one's destiny is to know the Eternal Constant. To know the Eternal Constant is to be enlightened. Whoever knows the Eternal Constant is open-minded. MacHovec Frank J. The Book of Tao, Peter Pauper Press, N.Y. 1952, p. 24, 25.

ABY had a "secret" from beginning to end. "I used to look at the mountains and trees. You cannot imagine what a person sees when he looks at nature in this way - not only for its beauty's sake, but from the point of view of life in it, and what goes on there. And I used to look and I lived with these things and no-one disturbed me"¹: it was almost as though he had a secret with nature.

ABY was a part of nature, and reflected on it intently, as we can see from all his poems. As Leah said,

בכל השירים שלו, בכל אחד ואחד מהם, צפון גרעין פילוסופי:
הכרה בעולם בשלמות, עם כל ההסתכלות האובייקטיבית של המשורר
בטבע הוא לעולם איננו מחוץ לטבע. 2

This tallies very much with the principle that Tao is primarily a cosmic religion, involving the study of the

1. If we read of this experience, together with the experiences of the Tao artist Adolph Jentsch, it may help us to understand what goes on in the soul life of ABY. Concerning Jentsch we read: sometimes he would decide not to paint, but just to sit on his camp-stool all day looking out at the awe-inspiring panorama, in meditation. He realized how greatly he enjoyed his solitude. It brought him close to himself. It was necessary for a sensitive man to get away from the masses, to live his inner experiences without being disturbed. The solitary or hermit is able to develop this inner life, to become aware of himself. He thought of how prophets went into the solitude of the desert to seek concentration and wisdom. Solitude forces one to think. Levinson Olga : Adolph Jentsch, Human & Rousseau, Cape Town, 1973, p. 50, 51.

2. פגישה עם משורר, quoting from Goldberg Leah, חנן חביר
חן ראשיתו השגה, p. 409

universe, and the place and function of man and all creatures and phenomena in it.¹

ABY was involved with the mysteries of life. "No true mystic would know himself to be such ... he is religious, cosmically religious in a broad sense, and all he does and says is therefore religious, but not self-consciously so."²

N. Zach said

יתכן שאילו הייתה השירה הזאת נכתבת
בתקופה אחרת הייתה לובשת צביון דתי מובהק.³

All through ABY's poems, he seems to be seeking something, a quest for human salvation.⁴ One seeks it in one's self. Suddenly, if we are lucky, something lights it up for us, as in a mirror, and we see it clearly.

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1. Cooper, J.C. Taoism, The Way of the Mystic, Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1972, p. 10.
 2. Blakney, R.B. The Way of Life, Lao Tzu, Mentor Books, New American Library, N.Y. 1983, p. 26.
 3. Zach Nathan, דבר, לפני שער עם נעילה, 11/6/60
 4. We would not be aware of a sense of spiritual want if we did not have the idea of infinity all the time within us. (Radhakrishnan, Emerson. Descartes and Dostoevski hold with this. Saher, P.J. Eastern Wisdom and Western Thought. Allen & Unwin, 1969, p. 61.)

USAGE OF PARADOX BY ABY

"Paradox is used occasionally by almost all poets."¹; by ABY all the time.²

Laotse³ is written only in paradox, and it is an eastern way of writing. In the case of ABY, it is a central device. There are juxtapositions of contrary words, ideas, concepts and forces, which are irreconcilable yet they make a complete entity, a "oneness" and technically they are indicative of each other, they shed light on each other. They are set against each other, to bring about sharply, the contrast between them. The contrasts are complementary and co-operative. Opposites can transform each other. The basis of the transformation and transmutation is the acceptance of the whole with its negative and positive

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1. Abrams, M.H. A Glossary of Literary Terms, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, N.Y., London, 1912.
 2. Zach, Nathan says that ABY describes his nature poems with careful opposites.

אח האור הטבע שלו הוא מרכז סביב נגודים זהירים.

11.6.60 , דבר , לפני שער עם נעילה

3. Tao.

aspects.¹

ABY steadfastly brings this device into play. He constantly places sweeping opposites in close proximity to each other, in a close spatial relationship, which are marked by sharp, unmistakable contrasts and conflicts.

There is a magnetic polar attraction between them, and they substantiate and enrich each other. Each one is only half an idea without the other, e.g. birth - death; black - white; summer - winter. The one gives rise to the other.

ABY weighs and reconciles his opposites, and places them together, for the sake of "truth".² ABY bears a message, and his message and his poetry (and his devices) are a part of the enigma and riddle of ABY.

We shall give a few examples:

In התורים שחבורו מסביב לעירי we have:

רעש	/	סוד
ויזרה מסביב	/	צפון
אור, האיר, תבדיר	/	צל

1. Cooper, J.C. Yin-Yang, The Taoist Harmony of Opposites. Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1987, p. 16.
The opposites have a vital need of each other just as the human being cannot live fully without relationships.
Cooper, J.C. Yin-Yang. The Taoist Harmony of Opposites. Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1987, p. 15.

2. loc. cit.

In אורות תולמים , אלו ל ב ש ד רה , the lights are dreaming,
(lights are usually clear, and dreaming is hazy); here,

אורות חוריים , lights are pale; (lights are usually
bright). The lights are soon followed by the shadows.

רוח קלה
מתן קול

The gentle breeze had "given its voice"

and now there is יָצָא מֶה .

The opposites create a tension between two interacting
elements or forces.

In לא ידעתי נפשי , we have the storm without, and the calm
within the house; wide-winged storm clouds are dragged
distances (storm clouds are dark) and light is radiated
from the earth.

The end of the first verse reads

בְּלִבִּי סִתְרָה
מִפְּנֵי הַסְעָרָה

In my heart is a hiding place from the storm (A hiding
place is secure, a storm is insecure).

There is the idyllic scene before the hearth. We have
golden autumn colours, gold and black.

In the third verse there is "thunder and noise in the

forest", and "sweet song and silence in your precious corner".

יָרַעַם אֶף יָרַעַשׁ הַיָּם
וּמְנוּחַ שִׁיר
מִתּוֹךְ הַמַּגֵּן
כְּנֻת יִשְׁרָאֵל.

In the fourth verse, there are the two pearls hidden in the sea bed, two little pearls hidden in the mighty sea. Again there is noise and שִׁיר וְנִיחָה and the two are hidden
כְּנֻת יִשְׁרָאֵל, and peaceful.

In the fifth verse, he comes to the spiritual, the soul. Although there was thundering storm (outside), he drank in the silence (within). His whole soul quivered, (a gentle quivering, as against the thundering of the storm.

רָאִי: כְּנֻת רִחַי יִרְטָט.

In the sixth verse, in the presence of the mighty, smiting waves, her look resting upon him trembles gently.

וְנִיחָה מִכֶּסֶּךְ הַרְדֵּעַ עָלַי יִנּוּחַ

The trembling of the soul, כְּנֻת רִחַי יִרְטָט
and וְנִיחָה מִכֶּסֶּךְ הַרְדֵּעַ עָלַי יִנּוּחַ

is a gentle trembling, gentle vibration, not the vibration of the storm and thunder. These opposites highlight and accentuate each other.

The tempest shrieks, but

את הפרדה
את השנואה
-

From the two lovers, him and his soul (or sweetheart),
there is a change-over to the whole universal soul, the
great soul before the L--d in the tempest..

In ליל לילי , White Nights of Dream, there is
someone sleeping.

"In these white nights of dream
Dreamt by a weary world."

באלה לילי החלום העלובים
שחלום עולם עיף

שקטו כוכבים
ורוח מנצחים תפכה -
עיניך תרחבנה.

"And your eyes grow wide."

There is no more sleeping - and there is a revelation, your
eyes grow wide, and out of eternities there blows a breeze.

This is a calming poem amongst ABY's storm poems: we have the opposites

לילות כי ילבינו
מעונות ≠ כועבים
עבר ≠ עתיד
הלבנים ≠ לילה שחור

In מלכות, day flickers, and the sea moans in a splendour of evening grief, but the poet says:

"Be seated still

Till I bid you: Rise and sing!"

שבי שקטה
עד אשר : קומי רני !

י'רני ≠ יהמה; לילה שחור ≠ לבנת השיש (שיש לבן)

There is day and night, beauty and sorrow, white and black. Unlike the storm poems, this is a serene, tranquil poem, and underlying it is a deep-seated bated anxiety. The train of the royal robe washes the marble stairs, and the waters swell. Venice sinks. The power of Nature takes over.

In חורף בהיר, the world is pure and hard and white.

סחור וקשה ולבן העולם.

Together with the name, הוֹרֵר בְּהִיר , this gives an impression of ice. The world is universe, or physical earth. It is hard and stationary, and then comes the opposite, movement - the north wind blows, it blows away the mist of dreams.

The world is pure, but the dreams of mist are blind and stray endlessly.

עור והוצה
עד בלי קץ -

The dreams of mist obscure the pure vision. There is snow (white); and the shadows of mountains (dark).

שֶׁלֶג מִבְּהִיק מַסְכִּיב
וְצֵל הָרִים תָּמִיד

The river is frozen, but its greenish dark-ish path is lost and winds on in the distance.

תִּפְּשׂוּ בְּתוֹךְ קִפְאוֹנוֹ
יִשְׁתַּרֵּץ הַנָּחַל
בְּרִיקָה שְׁחֵה כְּהָה
וְשֶׁלֶגִי זֶמֶר לוֹ
עַד אֲשֶׁר יֵאבֵד שְׁבִילוֹ
הִירָאֵק וְהַמַּתְפַּל
שֶׁם בְּמִדְחָק.

The river is in the shadow, but it has white snows of radiance on it.

מִזְמֹר too, is packed with paradox. We shall speak about it briefly.

You stand at the top of the mountains, and place your head among the great cold stars - and everything else sinks to the earth - and a black forgetfulness descends and you are awake to terrors above the darkness, and a star falls because of the trembling fiery roar that goes from hell to heaven. There is this roaring noise, whereas before it was so still and quiet.

ראש הרים	≠	שקעו לארץ
ארץ החיים מתחת	(≠)	ארץ המותים היא מתחת
יקוד	≠	שכחה
כוכב יפול	≠	השאגה עולה
ארץ	≠	שמים
בשר	≠	ערב

The star lands in your soul, and is extinguished. Now, although you have a star inside of you, there is total blackness in your soul.

וְכֹכֵב פִּי יִפּוֹל

— — — —

וְנִפֵּל הַכּוֹכֵב אֶל הַנֶּפֶשׁ

וְכִבְהָ בְּחֻמָּה.

In the morning, you still have a chance to hammer out your depth of heaven upon the face of the abyss - you have power, the vast sun is in your hands - but wait till evening comes!

Maybe you are a star!

This poem hovers between mania and depression, (with greater emphasis on the depression) - and notes some magical moment of בורלח in between.

In כנסת היום, an evening poem, indicating the evening of life, we remove the festal wreath and its leaves and rose petals are withering and falling.
And there is a reddish flow of twilight.

הלשף אדם - הערפילי

and so on.

ABY ends the poem with disquiet and dread. The poem is about youth and death.

Here is an exquisite farewell ceremony accompanied by "black violins". "Black violins" has in it music and death.

In לא ירעה נפש י In we have the winter storm as opposed to spring.

Also the "I" and the "thou" are juxtaposed.

בורדית אומר ים is based on Ps 19, v. 3 & 4. In the Psalm, the heavens declare the glory of God. ABY's poem, on the contrary, opens with a dirge.

The world rejoices in its sorrow. This is paradoxical.

ועולם מצערו מצרונן

(Perhaps sorrow is really a friend.)

In the second verse the heart is rejoicing.

ולב ב' יעלה הן אלהים קרבנו

because G-d brought us near

but the heart then repented

קרבנו ≠ והתנחם

This is paradoxical. This is a form of emphasis.

Tomorrow we shall die.

דמחר נמות

But then the heart is glad, and so on. (This is more paradox after the idea that tomorrow we shall die.)

To show the paradoxes in אשד' הזורעים ולא יקצורו ,

we can do no better than to quote from Dan Pagis:

"The poem revises the Biblical meaning and builds itself on a series of paradoxes: the sowers' joy issues from the fact that they shall not reap, and their glory and beauty (also reversing traditional passages) reside in their total renunciation of their ornaments. Their pride is humility, the cry of their heart blossoms into silence. And, finally, their blessing lies in attaining to oblivion.¹"

1. Burnshaw, S., Carmi, T., Spicehandler, E. The Modern Hebrew Poem Itself. Schocken, N.Y. 1966, p. 53.

This entire poem is built on paradoxes, which strengthens and emphasizes and underlines what the poet is telling us, the statement of his life. He uses words to talk about "Silence", which is a paradox on its own!

I would like to re-iterate and remind of the fact that paradox was the characteristic system of writing throughout Tao.¹

ABY was himself a paradox. There was a tearing in his heart. He renounced writing, but he still had poetry in his soul, and tried to keep it to himself. It continued for he did write in his diary. He also recited unwritten poems and other works to Leah. But he would not allow anything to be published in his name. He did not need or desire to send it to the world anymore. He had it within himself.

1. Cooper, J.C. has written an entire book on the subject entitled Yin and Yang, The Taoist Harmony of Opposites. Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1981.

From a book "Science and Civilization", by Joseph Needham, Vol III, we learn that the Taoist use of paradox gave inspiration to Chinese mathematicians. Chang Chung Yuan, Creativity and Taoism, Wildwood House, London, 1975.

THE PART IMPRESSIONISM PLAYED ON ABY IN HIS LIFE

ABY was an impressionable and impressive man. There was nothing that he did not soak up, and nothing he did not know.¹ We have been told he knew the Bible by heart, and Canetti said he had a whole library in his head, and nature, he did not simply absorb, he was a part of it. The simplest things impressed him. Nothing escaped him, he was like blotting paper. Not only did his soul drink its fill of the silence,² he drank his fill of whatever he observed, whatever was around him.

From childhood already, ABY was being told stories, which made an impression on him, and which he told Leah. When he told a story to Leah, it in turn made an impression on her. He always described the atmosphere, the impression and mood of things. This was the background of all his poems, the impression, the mood of nature, the clouds, the sky, the feel of things. She doesn't always remember the details

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1. Mann Yitzchak , ספרית פועלים, מרחביה,
8 May 1953.

והנער אברהם'ששי - כך היה קרוי בפני סבו ובפני מכריו - היה הולך וקולט
רשמים מן הנוף ומן הסביבה. היה מקשיב לשירי הבריות, וגם מאזין לשירי אילנות
ודשאים, היה רושם בנפשו סיפורים מובהקים ואורח-חיים מסוגים שונים - הכל ראו
עיניו הגדולות וקלטת נפשו וגיגזה בתוכה. היה סופג וסופג ואינו מאבד כלום.
Y. Mann proceeds to tell us about all the interesting
circle of people who lived in פשמישל

2.

ונפשי רותה את הדממה
(לא ידעתי נפשי)

but she always remains with a strong and vivid impression of what he told her. He had a rare strength and power to describe the atmosphere, and to convey it years later. In אלוף בשדה , the atmosphere is so strong, of lights, of shadows, of the leaf fluttering down into silence; in the storm poems, you can hear the storm outside; there is a storm pushing on your heart; it presses on to your walls and wakes you up, and confuses your dreams.

In לילות כי ילבינו , time stands still. In מלחמ , there is an impression of Venice with its golden sunset!

In the poems, we, the readers, are not given any solution, and that, in turn, creates an impression on us.¹

The poems of nature are live impressionistic "paintings"; man is conspicuous; it is almost as though he is not there, as though he hardly exists. This creates an impression - large Nature and little man.

ABY, in his telling of stories to Leah, spoke largely of simple folk whom he met up with, all through his life.

A big impression was made on him of "the beyond" from

1. Cooper, J.C. Taoism : The Way of the Mystic. Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1972, p. 102.

"Much was left unsaid, so that like the void, it drew the reader or observer into actual participation and involved him directly."

childhood.¹ It may be that impressionism was one of the strongest essences in his work, and this is the key word for his work.²

His poems are atmosphere poems, and that is what the ancient Chinese poems were. His poetry like life, flowed. Everything is conveyed by suggestion or symbols or by way of the technique of empty space or transparencies.

ABY's frame of mind that grew out of the force of his solitude is visible in his poems. He is at one and "alone" with Nature. The spirit of Nature reveals its character and is mirrored in his work. He describes the landscape, which in turn describes him.

1. Goldberg Leah, loc. cit. p. 25, 1952.

2. His poems do not tell a story with a plot.

ROYALTY IN ABY

ABY had an aristocratic, distinguished look, which reflected his nobility.¹

He had a high, haughty, shining forehead. Fellow poets thought he was "high and mighty" and lived "like a lord" in London. They could not know how humbly and austere he lived.

He was intellectual, a genius and he elevated those around him.

He was described in various ways; cold and hard and purist, with an atmosphere of responsibility, careful about every syllable and every word; as echoing European aristocracy

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1. Both Shofman & Mann and others have told us this. Shofman met ABY in Levov during the 1st World War. He talks about his original aristocratic flair. He is known to have given outstanding lectures. There was something that was magnetic and charismatic about him that compelled Canetti to go and see him every day for 1 1/2 years, without ever having met him, and without a word passing between them, their communication being effected in silence.

Shofman Gershom in ידיעות אחרונות, נצנוצים,

June 1950. Also Mann Yitzchak, loc. cit. p. 115.

Canetti, Elias. The Play of the Eyes. loc. cit. Later, when watching the march of Fascism across Europe, Canetti delegated all analyses to his mentor, Dr Sonne. (ABY's name by birth.) (Jewish Chronicle England. In Book Review, 28 Sept 1990 by Gerald Jacobs, p. 17.)

and on a par with his European counterparts; as aesthetic, refined and sensitive.¹

His images were aristocratic. One can sense in the make-up of a person, the nobility of his soul, his education, his way of life, his character. From orphanhood, his grandfather brought him up to the best in a cultural environment.²

ABY was described on a radio programme, as being aesthetic, נזיר , immaculate, with a look of

אצילון and עליון, both wonderful and tragic at the same time. A fellow townsman, Idit Knoller, had said ABY was "proud, and knew what you were thinking". He was described as an original and serious thinker, with authoritative and reliable ideas (Lipschitz).

His pupil from Vienna, Jerocham Torkas said:

שיחת התולין שלו הייתה שירה.

1. These attributes were given by T. Rivner, Ungerfeld, Dav Sadan, Friedman, Benshalom.

אונגרפלד, אברהם בן יצחק, על המשמר, 3.7.50 .

פרידמן, אגלי ברולת, דבר השבוע, 22.6.50 .

סדן דב, דבר, 25.11.55 .

בנשלום בנציון, אברהם בן יצחק, ספר שירים .

ריבנר טוביה, דברים אחדים על שירת אבי, למרחב, מאי, 25.2.52 .

2. Whatever he did he liked to do well. Jerusalem Tape loc. cit.

Ada Zemach said "We don't see such a phenomenon today, as ABY".¹

The critics did not understand Shelley aright (Alfred Noyes)², and similarly with ABY. It is suggested by the writer of this thesis that the Hebrew critics were not exposed to Taoism, as was ABY, and that too, constituted his aristocratic make-up.

1. Lipschitz. This tape was produced on קול ישראל, 1989 by Chanan Mitler and Rachel Maran, and organized by Chanan Hever.

2. Criticism of the kind that talked vaguely of his "luminous wings" was itself lost in the "void". It had never read Shelley carefully enough to grasp the extraordinary facts that had suggested those vague phrases to their unconscious authors; the fact to begin with - that there is hardly a page in Shelley which does not deal directly with the phenomena of light. This quite definite preoccupation with effects of light, a peculiarity of method quite unlike anything else in English poetry, would have been very definitely noted if it had been properly observed. It has not been noted at all. It has merely suggested to hasty and sleepy critics - in a world where there are many other books to be read - a vague general effect of radiance, and a sort of sub-conscious transference of this vague luminosity to their own adjectives.
Noyes Alfred : Some Aspects of Modern Poetry. Hodder & Stoughton Ltd. London (no date) p. 24.

ON THE QUESTION OF HOW A PERSON (e.g. A POET) CAN RESOLVE HIS
ANGST

It is possible that a person could resolve his angst by the adoption of any of the following alternatives: The adoption of a particular philosophy; prayer and meditation; relaxation and recreations of diversion; exercise, e.g. jogging, which leads one into an euphoric state; love; family activity; involvement in activist movements; committed study; committed friendship; a withdrawal from society; or could frenzied presentiment be overcome through artistic media of self-expression, as practised by some of the poets, and artists, notably Vincent van Gogh?

Unfortunately these solutions were not appropriate for ABY, who vowed himself to silence and when one reads a poem such as אֵיךְ לֵב אֶבְרָהָם, one realizes that his life could only have been a high-vaulted hell, impossible of survival, without an escape of some form or another as he bottled all his angst within.¹

1) He kept his troubles strictly to himself which magnified them in his own eyes. Ada Zemach in the broadcast said it was as if he had a high wall between him and the world as if he was guarding something that was only his (writer's translation). (Kol Yisrael programme from Jerusalem in סיון, 1989), loc. cit.

INTIMATION OF ANGST¹ AS EXPRESSED IN THE POEMS WITH
PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO DEATH

ABY was a very involved, complex personality. In the first place he was different from most people,² possessing not only great and tremendous knowledge,³ but also an attractive personality, through which he was able to communicate his ideas to people.⁴ At the same time he suffered from great stress; (Leah has told us this clearly throughout her book) arising from a feeling of apartness and inner fears and worries.

This inquiry into the angst experienced by the poet is perhaps necessary in order to ascertain the extent to which it is possible that he might have turned to philosophy as an antidote to his suffering.

1. ABY not only indicated fear of new stars stepping down to replace those which set forever, but he was constantly beset by high walls or barriers. He built up walls around him, as if guarding a secret entirely his own. Zemach Ada. Tape Kol Yisrael (loc. cit.). He wrote of high trees around him, or high mountains, closing him in. Even the ג' יב with ABY's fascination for words (he wrote a dictionary of synonyms), could be ג' יב , "a fortified wall" (see Alkalay Dictionary).

2. In the broadcast Ada Tzemach said that he was ג' יב , and also ג' יב .

3. Yitzchak Mann, loc. cit. p. 120, 1953.

4. See Shofman Gershon's article in the Kressel Lexicon p. 281, where he draws attention to the remarkable lectures on Hebrew literature that ABY gave to Jews from various countries, who did not understand Hebrew, that attracted much appreciation and large attendances.

In his poems, in his portrayal of himself in the world, he shows ambivalence of character, for instance, mastery as opposed to dread.

The black colour appears in many of his poems as melancholic expressions

כְּנֻסוֹת שְׁחֹרִים (כְּנֻסוֹת הַיּוֹם) ; וְשֹׁעֵרָה הֵן שְׁחֹרָה (מַלְכוּת)
 יִדְעָה שְׁחֹרָה הַיָּמָּה (לֹא יֹדְעָה נַפְשִׁי)
 שְׁחֹרָה שְׁמֵלָה-מְשִׁיחַ (לֹא יֹדְעָה נַפְשִׁי)
 תָּרַח הַשְּׂכָחָה הַשְּׁחֹרָה - (מִזְמוֹר)
 עַל פְּנֵי שְׁחֹרָה אֶמְתֵּן (בַּלֵּילָה יַעֲבוֹר סַעַר)

The evening, and night appears constantly as an expression of the finality, end of things.

הַיּוֹם יֹדְעָה בְּעֵסְרָהּ (מַלְכוּת)
 יְגוֹן הָעֶרֶב (מַלְכוּת)
 בַּת-לַיְלָה (מַלְכוּת)
 לַיְלָה תִּחְלוֹט הַלְּבָנִים (לַיְלֹת כִּי יִלְבִּינוּ)
 עַד עֶרֶב (מִזְמוֹר)
 וְכְנֻסוֹת הַיּוֹם (כְּנֻסוֹת הַיּוֹם)
 אִם הָעֶרְבִים (כְּנֻסוֹת הַיּוֹם)
 יְגוֹן-עֶרְבוּת, לַיְלָה גְּדוֹל, רִגָּה-עֶרֶב (כְּנֻסוֹת הַיּוֹם)

Forever there are storms in the world around him.

בְּטַעֲמָהּ, מִפְּנֵי הַטַּעֲמָהּ, יִדְעָה אֵף יִדְעָה הַיָּמָּה, יִכָּה מִשְׁפָּרִי הָרוּחַ, הַטַּעֲמָה צוּחָה,
 שְׁאוֹן מִשְׁפָּרִים בַּיָּמָּה, לִקְרַאת אֹדְנֵי בְּטַעֲמָהּ (לֹא יֹדְעָה נַפְשִׁי)
 בַּלֵּילָה יַעֲבוֹר סַעַר, הַלֵּילָה בְּעֶבֶר-סַעַר (בַּלֵּילָה יַעֲבוֹר סַעַר)

Animals, objects, don't talk or even cry, but scream around him; the word "screaming" has a very unpleasant screeching sound to it.

הַטַּעֲמָה צוּחָה (לֹא יֹדְעָה נַפְשִׁי)
 צוּחָה צִפּוֹר (עַל הַסְּפָרִים יִשְׁבְּחִי)

The poet places himself on the edge of things, not amidst the happenings, but rather as an onlooker - outsider (even outsider to his own life) who is left by the road side:

נָחַץ וּמַקְשִׁיב ...

וְאֲנִי נָחַץ הַדָּחַק מִמֶּנִּי אֲנִי. (על הספרים ישבתי)

...נִעְמָד עַל שְׁפָתַי...

הַעֲדוּבִים וְהַנָּאִים לֹאִין קָצָה בְּבוֹדוּתָם. (כנסות היום)

The poet is one of the lonely ones (בודדים אומרים)

Forgotten

לוֹטֵי אֲדָתָה הַשְׁכָּחָה (אשרי הזורעים)

In the course of ABY's reading the subject of death often arose, leading to his brooding on that subject.¹

A person like ABY could hardly escape, especially when he had an a priori, sensitivity to and fear of the subject of death as is reflected in his poems. In all this weighing and balancing there was much vacillation, and for ABY, the scales were gloomily weighted down, diminishing his morale.

In an unpublished fragment of a poem,² the poet courageously calls upon himself to try and overcome, and uplift himself out of the depths of depression; and speedily too, before it is too late (his hands are bleeding and his

1. e.g. the writing of his friends Broch (Death of Vergil), Canetti (Blendung), von Hofmannsthal (Jedermann) and so on.

2. Hever (loc. cit.) p. 391 (6 lines).

days are heavy upon him). There is no time to be lost : it is a matter of urgency - and this urgency can be heard in the rhythm.

עֵלָה עֵלָה מִמַּעַמְאִים עֵלָה
עֵלָה עֵלָה מִמַּעַמְאִים עֵלָה
מִפְּתוּשִׁים וְהַרְבוֹת עֵלָה
וְעַם זֶדִיךְ זָבוֹת דָּם
וְאֵם מְבַדֵּד יְמִיךְ שֵׁם
וְאֵם שָׁקַע הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁקִיעוֹת לֹאִין קֵץ
עֵלָה

1

There is a sense of powerlessness (perhaps associated with ABY's silence.) Note the unending sinking feeling (the alliteration of the " ש ") in the line.

This section on angst will now be closed with mention of two more unpublished "death" poems; one is a fragment written in Zurich.² The poet speaks of the skeleton crumbling below the brilliant stars and the cold world sunken into an abyss : all has become one huge abyss : all has sunken again.

The lowest depths of the death poetry is a fragment in Dr Hever's thesis.³

1. The sounds of the "עין" in עֵלָה and עַם and then אֵם and אֵם create a tremendous effect.

2. The fragment was written on 13/11/25. See Hever (loc. cit.) p. 389.

3. It has no date or page or accompanying description.

The poem speaks for itself as follows:-

וְגַם מִנֶּחֱזֶה הַרְבֵּה שָׁנִים
כִּאֲשֶׁר הִתְפַּדְּדָה בֵּט הַגְּלִילָה
וְהִיטָה לְגֵרֵי אָבֶק וְרוּחַ
בְּשָׂרֶיהָ שֶׁל מִנֵּז אוֹתָם הִפִּיצָה
לְכָל עֵבֶר, עוֹד נִשָּׂא עֵפֶס
קוֹל זַעֲקַת הָאִישׁ הַפֶּת, שׁוֹנֵעַ גְּדוּלָה
שֶׁל תָּתֵם.

CONCEPT OF DEATH IN THE POET'S CHILDHOOD AND ADULT LIFE

Leah Goldberg tells of many little incidences or conversations that indicate ABY's fear of the "נוראית" ¹ of death ("איום ונורא"); they tell of his sensitivity to the frailty of all life.

כמה פעמים בשיחתו היה חוזר ואומר: אני ראיתי בפניהם מוות כזה: ארי : הרי זה איום ונורא. זהו מוות: והמילה מוות בפיו היתה לובשת צורה של כל הנוראות בחלון. דווקא כשדיבר על המוות ביחס לאנשים חיים, על אד המוות המהלך בתוכנו, המהלך בתוך ההוי שלנו ושט על פניו מסכה של חיים. אבל אותו יחס מתמיד שבין החיים למוות שישנו בכל נפש היה היה גילוי לפניו כמשהו חיובי, כמשהו המשמש עזרה לנצח.

It is significant that he thought the constant relationship between life and death in every living thing had in it something of eternity.

1) Leah Goldberg (loc. cit.) p. 29. Also as Ada Zemach tells us in quoting ABY in the Radio broadcast (loc. cit.).

He was so happy to read Goethe's discussion about the continuation of life after death, for he was really involved in a serious problem about death, for instance: his regarding the short-livedness of flowers as a tragedy. (Goldberg, Leah, p. 14); the story of the jacaranda tree. He showed acute suffering at being told of the beauty of its blossoming, for as the blossoming develops, so the withering process is accelerated (p. 14); the young elm trees are his friends, and their snapping and dying in the frost is extremely painful to him (p. 16); there is the story of the fish-market (p. 26); The story of the strawberry-collecting (p. 27); ABY's conversation with Martin Buber, giving a hint of re-incarnation (p. 29-30); a conversation with his grandfather in which his grandfather said that changes in "life", merely implied a going from room to room through different doors (p. 28); he saw death in living persons (p. 29); he saw the skeleton within a person (p. 31); he had frightening eschatological visions (p. 50), etc.

We must remember that his father died when he was very young, and perhaps that fact affected him adversely.¹

A certain dream ABY had, accompanied him all his days, and it is clear that that dream influenced his mental processes, or was influenced by them.²

1) Mann Yitzchak.

אורלוגין, ספרית פועלים, מדחמית, 8.5.55, p. 114

2) Goldberg, Leah, פגישה עם מאורר loc. cit.

THE MESSAGE OF TAO AND THE CONCEPT OF SILENCE AND WITHDRAWAL
IN TAO

The central message of Taoist philosophy is that peace and an ordered life depend upon a change in the life ideals of the individuals making up a social community so that nothing can change the world except wide-spread personal regeneration. For this reason the pioneer exponent of Tao was most deeply concerned with the soul of the individual.

Hand in hand with this goes the glad acceptance of the natural ways of life, a joyful falling in with the rhythmic course of nature. In this connection Lao-Tsu advocated quietude because he taught that the bliss of communion could only be attained with stillness, never with assertion.

He and the great teachers that came after him counselled the virtues of humility, frugality, moderation, gentleness, and non-display, and although these led naturally to a withdrawal from the over-activity of the world, the withdrawal was one of strength and not mere austerity.

The result was that when a sage withdrew from everyday activities and, entering into the silence, experienced a mystic understanding of the Universe as a revelation of Tao, or when an artist reached this understanding, he achieved

greater powers of expression than ever before, and in the way of enlightenment found his contentment.¹

1. Herewith are two examples of mystics who withdrew:

"Brother Lawrence:

About the time of his army service, when he was eighteen years old, he experienced his first revelation from G-d. The disclosure was the sight, in midwinter, of a dormant, leafless tree. As he gazed upon the trunk and branches, in which all life was asleep, he experienced a vision of the tree as it would be in summer, garbed in countless thousands of leaves, with flowers, then fruit, and therein he felt a sense of G-d's power and bountifulness that never left him. Reflecting upon the leafless tree, G-d's way with it, he was then and there he said, "converted". He felt that he had been specially favoured in the revelation and thenceforth struggled to loosen the ties of the world upon him." Cheney Sheldon : Men who have walked with G-d. Alfred A. Knopf, N.Y. 1945, p. 291.

"As to ABY ceasing to write, my reaction after reading his poems is that his position was probably like that of St. Thomas Aquinas who was a prolific writer and great polemicist, but after having a mystic experience, 'seeing the light', realised that "the rest is silence" and never wrote another word, also realising that as the Te Ching says "The Tao that can be named is not the true Tao". I would suggest that A. Ben Y., may have had such an experience, become 'enlightened' and simply ceased writing about life and just lived it. He would very likely have picked up his Taoism from his wide reading and although much of the literature would not be specifically Taoist he would have the inner light to see by and to lead him to the heart of the spiritual matters. Apart from that, if he had been interested in things Chinese, as you say, he would hardly have failed to come across the Taoist poets and would certainly have felt an immediate affinity with them. (From private correspondence of J.C. Cooper, to the writer of this thesis (June 12, 1989).)

SILENCE AS CONNECTED WITH A WITHDRAWAL FROM LIFE AND WRITING
AND THE VALUE OF SILENCE AS A MEANS OF EXPRESSION

Silence comes as a revelation of truth just as the efficacy and power of "the still small voice" came as an inspiration and a deeper understanding to humanity.¹

In the Taoist tradition both the mystic and the artist withdraw partially from life and by going into the silence achieve a greater communication than ever before. This sacrifice is in reality an attainment and has increased meaning for the individual inasmuch as his sense of values is attuned to the spiritual goal that he seeks to realise. This truth is not limited in any way and has equal application to all.

THE MYSTERY OF THE POET'S HAVING CEASED TO WRITE

It is generally considered that a poet of the distinction of ABY's having ceased to write is a mystery. It is called such expressly by Prof. Leah Goldberg in her contribution to the Encyclopaedia Judaica sub. nom. "Ben Yitzchak, Avraham", and generally, he is considered a mystery.

1) The L--d was not in the wind ... not in the earthquake, not in the fire. And after the fire a still small voice. 1 Kings 19, 11.

Numerous attempts to resolve the question have been made by the writers and critics, but yet it remains a mystery.¹

It is proposed herein to re-examine the available facts in order to ascertain whether it is possible to advance any cogent reason or reasons for the poet's withdrawal from publication and for his going into the silence.

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1. ביאורו הגדול, שבו חי שנים רבות מוזכר לא האמין, כי אזני אדם רבות מסוגלות עדיין להקשיב ליסוד זה של המציאות: היתה זו, מן הסתם, אחת מסבות שתיקתו. אחת מדבות, אך דבר זה לא יפתר לעולם בשלמותו.

Quoted from Goldberg, Leah.
by

פגישה עם משורר

ויבובסקי חנן, אמירות בודדות, שדמות, גליון מ"ה, תורף השלי"ב

REASONS GENERALLY ADVANCED FOR HIS WITHDRAWAL AND CRITICISM
OF SUCH REASONS

Hanan Hibowsky has suggested that it is futile to speculate on the reasons for the poet's withdrawal since Prof. Leah Goldberg who had a special relationship with him was unable to explain the reasons.¹

ABY himself was in fundamental despair in regard to the state of the world. He was strongly critical and sensitive and felt that he was experiencing the destruction of a period² and that the world was in a state of chaos, disordered and decadent. As far as literature was concerned he noted that foremost literary figures had realised that the public was no longer interested in literature in a meaningful way.

1. אמירות בודדות, שדמות, גליון מ"ה, חורף תשל"ב

2. See Goldberg, פגישה עם משורר loc. cit. p. 49.

Nietsche: In "Venice":

האם מקשיב לי אי מי

Rilke: In the Duino Elegies¹

מי אם אצק אותי ישנע

ABY said to Leah,

2, 1

השירה מבקשת הד ואיננה מוצאת אותו עוד.

In this connection he criticised both writers and readers. The readers were slated because they preferred to read American style short stories. The writers then might just as well commit suicide, he told Leah². He said to her that people would not appreciate him.³

Nathan Zach⁴ puts his withdrawal down to melancholy in a

1. Brunowski, Yoram.

1975 לומר את הדברים האלה, הארץ,
Date unclear.

Joseph Dan in Gershom Scholem, loc. cit. p. 158, says: "The mystic deals with contents which are beyond logic, beyond language, beyond human experience; he deals with mysticism, a positive term, which really conveys the unknown, and the unknowable. Accuracy and clarity are out of the question; complete communication is absolutely impossible. If it were possible, the contents would not be "mystical" any more, and could not convey truths which are far beyond human logic. The mystic cannot convey truth which is far beyond human language. The mystic cannot communicate the truth which is in his heart and in his vision, p. 159.

2. Goldberg, Leah. פגישה עם משורר loc. cit. p. 58

3. This is like a story that he had once told her of a beautiful flower that could not appreciate its own beauty (Leah Goldberg p. 64) (loc. cit.).

4. Zach Nathan דבר, לפני שער עם נעילה loc. cit.

tired world. He points out that Benzion Benshalom maintains that the rebuke and chastisement in some of ABY's posthumous poems e.g. "Why have your flags faded", and "For whom did the cock crow?", show that the poet feels ashamed of his own generation of the revival and this led him to despair and to withdraw. Hever seems to agree.

Yitschak Mann ascribes the reason to his ever present debilitating illness which led to his despairing of the world and reality.

אבי יצא את לונדון וחזר לווינא בלב פצוע,
מחלתו ומיאוסו גם יחד.

1

A further reason sometimes advanced is his disillusion with politics. His closeness to politics is demonstrated by his political poems e.g.

אשרי (earlier version); בודדים (later version)
and על מה נבל דגליכם

To him politics was a living thing. Even although he had separated himself from politics and political activity he did not see himself as out of practical politics.² He could not endure the manner in which Zionist politics was conducted. On the one hand he enstranged himself completely

1. Mann, Yitzchak. loc. cit. p. 118.

2. Goldberg, Leah, loc. cit. p. 49.

from politics.' On the other hand he was deeply involved (without the obligations or responsibilities)¹

Politics is one thing;² as far as the criticism of his poetry is concerned, that is another matter; it is believed that he was made of sterner stuff than to resign as a result.

In the recent broadcast on the work of ABY, given on Kol Israel, to which further reference is made herein, Dr. Hever suggested that one of the important reasons for the poet's silence may have been because he felt himself unable to carry

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1. Hever Hanan on the radio programme (loc. cit.).

It was said on the tape, Kol Yisrael, 1989, on Avraham Ben Yitzchak, organised by Hever, Maran & Mitler, that

עד ספרותו היה אבי איש פוליטי
Lifschitz visited him in Vienna in 1920 and found him very alert to political facts - world-wise. He had a tense and intense relationship to society. He was deeply involved, but found the way matters were handled quite intolerable. (Goldberg, Leah, פגישה עם משורר loc. cit. p. 50).

2. Let us see what is written about Jentsch's withdrawal (the Namibian German Taoist artist): "Jentsch's withdrawal from society, from the turmoil of politics and from the responsibilities to the community and domestic life, is actually in accord with Chinese tradition. When artists (Chinese) entered monasteries or lived as hermits, they were not regarded as eccentrics or religious maniacs or misanthropes. On the contrary, their behaviour was conceived as being highly ethical. It was understood that daily trials and tribulations should be discarded in the search for harmony of the soul and tranquillity of the spirit."
(Levinson Olga : Adolph Jentsch, Human & Rousseau, Cape Town, 1973, p. 37.)

out the wide and comprehensive aspirations that he had in the development of his poetic art.¹

For reasons already given it is thought that this overlooks .ABY's perseverance and does not satisfactorily explain his silence. It is thought that one who does anything well enjoys doing it. Any imperfections in his art might have been discouraging but could hardly have led to abandonment. As for his pessimism, this fits in with his own unhappiness and loneliness but hardly provides an acceptable basis for

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1. A number of other writers have expressed their opinions on ABY, a) on his ability, b) on what they think are the reasons for his withdrawal. As regards his withdrawal, the writer of this thesis strongly questions the validity of all the reasons given. The fact that it is still a mystery, casts doubt upon the credibility of these reasons. "Amongst these opinions were those given by T. Rivner, M. Ungerfeld, Ya-akov Fichman, Zemora, Benzion Benshalom, David Aron, R. Gorpein, Sh. Pnueli, Dov Sadan, D.A. Friedman and Aharon Bar Shmuel. The sources are as follows:

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- פרידמן ד.א., אגל בדלת, דבר השבוע, 22.6.50 .
- פנואלי ש., שירה ומחשבה, למרחב, מאי, 16.6.61 .
- שופמן גרשום, נצנוצים, ידיעות אחרונות, יוני 1950 .

his withdrawal from literary publication. His withdrawal is indeed exceptional in the literary world. The artist would indeed hesitate before withdrawal in case he might be forgotten. Probably the fact that he was ill or discouraged would not lead to withdrawal because, as an artist, he would not wish to be forgotten. It would require a firmer philosophical basis for his withdrawal.¹ Despite his own storms in his soul, this poet was able to give to the world, perhaps, a message of silence, as in בורדים אופקים .

This view is endorsed by Dan Pagis in his contribution to the Modern Hebrew Poem itself.²

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1. In this connection Dr. Hakak has reminded us that ABY's fate was never that of a forgotten poet, although he praised silence and forgetting; ועל שפתם הפך הדומיה
1975, 21 Nov.
 2. See Chapter Avraham ben Yitzchak in S. Burnshaw, T. Carmi, E. Spicehandler in "The Modern Hebrew Poem Itself" Schocken N.Y. Speaking of אברהם בן יצחק, Pagis says
"If the deceptively simple poem reveals a wealth of meaning, it would seem to rise from the poet's insistence upon silence as the only possible means of self-expression." In his criticism of Ashrei he repeats again ABY's "conviction and confidence in silence as the only true mode of self expression".

He did not simply stop publishing, but preceded that by a firm statement of his intentions. The important fact is that the decision to go into the silence was a decision, and not simply an emotive reaction to circumstances. It was preceded by a firm resolution to adhere to silence. He was convinced and confident that silence was the only mode of self expression.

THE NATURE OF THE POET'S WITHDRAWAL

It is an oversimplification to look upon the withdrawal as simply a withdrawal from publishing his poems. It was far more complex e.g. he would not sign his name. He told Leah Goldberg on one occasion, when he signed a poem for her, that it was the second time that he had signed his name after an interval of many years.¹ On a particular occasion when he had discoursed to her most brilliantly on the origins of poetry, she suggested that it would be a great loss if his ideas were not available to the public generally, and wanted to send a stenographer to record them. He stated that he would not publish anything in his own name on any account and became quite angry. On a similar occasion a person who was writing a book on music held a discussion with the poet. The poet spoke so cleverly on certain aspects of the subject that the writer of the book wished to include these sections in the forthcoming book. The poet refused altogether but gave the writer permission to use the material as long as the poet's name did not appear thereon.

It has been mentioned that Bialik was greatly impressed with the work of ABY. He wished to publish literary criticisms prepared by him and an anthology of his poems. He never received the material for these projects, though one cannot be certain that it was the reluctance of ABY to publish or

1. Goldberg, Leah פגישה עם משורר loc. cit. p. 64.

some other reason that inhibited his furnishing the material.¹

If ever it happened that his name appeared in print or that his name received publicity his face showed an expression of revulsion and sorrow.²

There is a parallel between his ideas and the early Taoist poets. There was a reluctance concerning the publication of poetry with the ancient Chinese, which, when published, did not bear the name of its author. It was also considered a prostitution to sell poetry, or to make a profession out of writing poetry. Poetry was considered to be a way of life, and no more.

It is a fact that in every book on eastern religions that one studies, renunciation of the ego for the sake of attaining to the higher self is considered essential.

In the I Ching,³ which is a Taoist philosophical work, it

1. ביאליק ואברהם בן יצחק, למרחב

2. Goldberg, Leah. פגישה עם משורר loc. cit. p. 5.
הוא לא רצה שידובר בו ברבים. אם הופיע שמו בדפוס, היו פניו לובשות
אותה ארשת של דאבון ושאש כאחת, שהיה מביא את רואיה לידי בקיפת לב.

3. Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1951.

is stated that not every man has an obligation to mix in the affairs of the world but that such withdrawal is only justified when we strive to realise in ourselves the higher aims of mankind. ABY, whose heart was in politics, must have felt himself justified in withdrawing in order to realise his spiritual ideas. It was considered normal and natural for scholars and sages and active communal workers and politicians to retire into a retreat of peaceful silence.

THE POET'S INTEREST IN ANCIENT CHINESE CULTURE

In the unavoidable absence of the testimony of living persons who can speak as to this, one can rely mainly on two sources. The first is internal evidence as to this in the poet's writings. The other is the writings of any friends or contemporaries who may have recorded information as to this interest.

One of the main sources is Professor Leah Goldberg, who saw a great deal of the poet in his later years, and who wrote extensively (but afterwards) of their conversations. As it happens she records a very considerable sympathy, on the poet's part, with ancient Chinese culture.¹

This interest was motivated in part because the poet felt that the Chinese would one day change the face of the world and that to be 'with it' one needed to understand their deep and ancient tradition. The poet, however, also felt attracted to that tradition for its own intrinsic merit.

He had made a serious attempt to learn the Chinese language while in Vienna but eventually, much to his sorrow had to give this up.

1) Another main source was the Nobel Prize Winner, Canetti. He wrote an entire chapter on ABY in his book called "Play of the Eyes", entitled "Dr Sonne" (loc. cit.).

He understood, too, the exactness of the Chinese language and explained to her how it was possible to express in Chinese particular nuances which were lacking in other languages except by explanation. He spent a lot of time unfolding to her his ideas on the subject, and very much regretted the difficulty of appreciating Chinese culture from mere translations, which however accurate, led only to a superficial understanding of their subject matter. Leah Goldberg, however, has emphasized that although this may be correct as a generalisation, as a fact ABY had a profound knowledge of Chinese culture¹.

He used to speak to Leah Goldberg in the most appreciative way about Chinese calligraphy. He pointed out to her the beautiful designs and the superb execution of the various letters and symbols.

ABY's friend, Canetti and ABY used to discuss Oriental religions.²

Another confirmation of ABY's interest in eastern matters, was the fact that his favourite person to sit and convene with in Israel, was Emmanuel Olswanger an Oriental translator.³

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1. Goldberg, Leah. פגישה עם משורר loc. cit. p. 22
 2. Canetti, Elias, Play of the Eyes, loc. cit. p. 142.
 3. From a note in ABY's notebook in the עזרון in Jerusalem.

CONCLUSION - □ 1 3 0

"TO CONVEY THE LESSON WITHOUT SPEAKING
THAT IS THE SAGE'S RARE ATTAINMENT"

and

"THE ONE WHO KNOWS THE SECRET DOES NOT SPEAK"

and

"CARELESS OF GREATNESS
THE SAGE BECOMES GREAT"

also

"FREE OF SELF-DISPLAY

HE IS SEEN BY ALL

CLEANSED OF PRIDE

HE IS HONOURED"

and

"TO BE LOWLY IS TO REACH THE HIGHEST"

also

"IN STILLNESS IS THE WORLD RESTORED"¹

These proverbs or axioms, or aphorisms can be read infinitely
in any of the many translations of Laotse and the Tao Way.

1. Cheney, Sheldon. Men who have walked with God :
Alfred A. Knopf, N.Y. p. 18, 18, 15, 26, 26, 21.

It has been recognised by no less authorities than C.G. Jung¹ and Martin Buber² that the men of the East are inclined to go to 'the within' whereas the occidentalists seek the outwards more.

We read in Tao:

"I know three precious gifts. Hold them fast!

One is renunciation ..."

Many of the ideas in these poems might be the spiritual heirlooms of Taoist ideals recorded centuries earlier.

As the poet Lao-Tzu says:

Void the mind,

Open the being to God,

Abide in stillness,

Life arises and passes,

Birth, growth and return,

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1. Jung, C. His foreword to the Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation - Evans-Wentz, W.Y. pp. xxix-ixiv.
 2. Buber, M. On Judaism ed. by Nahum N. Glatzer. Schocken Books, New York, 1972, p. 58.

A rythmic arc from Source to Source.

In the life rhythm is quietude,

A tranquil submission;

In the soul's submission is peace,

Absorption in Eternity.

And so, the Great Light.¹

Tao is one of the most frequently translated books, second only to the Bible, and at the time that ABY was studying and reading the books of Tao were available.

They had been translated by the Jesuits and published (Latin) in 1788 and German in 1828.² Also in German in 1870. They were also available in other forms eg. Hegel had written and published (in German) a course of lectures on Taoism, Confucianism and the philosophy found in the I Ching. They were later translated into English.³

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1. Cheney, Sheldon : Men who have walked with G-d. Alfred A. Knopf, 1945. p. 25, 37.
 2. See Dr. Cooper's letter to the writer of this thesis, June 12 1989.
 3. Viz Hegel's lectures on the History of Philosophy edited and translated by E.S. Haldane.

Dresden at the turn of the century was one of the art centres of Europe. An Exhibition of Ancient Chinese Paintings (8th to 10th Century) took place there in the early years of the 19th Century. Germany at that time was buzzing with an interest in Eastern themes.

Chang Chung-Yuan summarised the influence Eastern philosophy had on the western world:¹

"Ever since the beginning of the 19th century, Taoist ideas have flown like an invisible stream into the mind of the West, to scholars who held differing views concerning Tao and whose insight was applied to their respective subjects. Besides the thinkers mentioned above (Hegel et al.) there have been many other men and women of learning deeply interested in the philosophy of Tao and whose insight was applied to their respective subjects."

There could have been important literary influences that went back to Eastern and in particular Chinese sources to which ABY would have been exposed e.g. Goethe - and certain German writers.

1. Chang Chung-Yuan, Creativity & Taoism, Wildwood House, London, 1975, p. 9.

It has, accordingly, been shown that the poet had an interest in the subject and the opportunity to study it in depth, leading to the reasonable probability that this is in fact what happened and that he studied the subject in depth. This indeed fits in, as has already been emphasised, with what Professor Leah Goldberg has written about the poet's interest in and knowledge of the subject.

The Taoist mystics achieved a certain balanced harmony in their lives following on their withdrawal and silence, but the same is not true for ABY who, although going into the silence and withdrawing from public attention, remained subject to depression and unhappiness. Even assuming that he was not completely successful in his espousal of Taoist philosophy this does not mean that he was not attracted to it and did not attempt to attain an inner harmony by following its ideals. It seems likely that indeed he tried but that his personality was too complex and ill adjusted and his constitution too undermined by illness to obtain success. He may have succeeded partly eg. by entering into the silence but on the other hand he could not harmonise his soul with his ideals and remained frustrated. The very imperfections that he was trying to overcome may have constituted the obstacles to the goal that he was pursuing.

The poet remains then an enigma. Accomplished and perfect as he was in his writing, in his personal relations he stood alone, unable to adjust to society.

He certainly accomplished great artistic success for which important recognition has come his way particularly posthumously.

The reasons for ABY's decision to withdraw from publicity and go into the silence have puzzled the reading public and provided a mystery for admiring writers and critics.

It is believed by the present writer that the decision was motivated by philosophical persuasion and did not come about as a mere emotive response to difficulties or criticism. The poet was greatly interested in Ancient Chinese Culture, as shown above, and there is a reasonable possibility that he took up Tao as a way of life and sought to follow its precepts. He may well have believed, in common with mystics generally, that this ancient way was, at its mystic roots, at one with his Judaic upbringing. This interpretation is assisted by the knowledge that one should approach his poetry with a magical as well as an intellectual understanding.¹

1. See Hakak p. 29 loc. cit. citing Pnueli.

It may well be that ABY's incomparable style to which attention has been drawn (under the heading "Stature") may have been enhanced by the very fact that because of this interest in Chinese art and philosophy he was the product of different cultures and was thus able to synthesise in his writings important elements from each, which, combined in masterly fashion resulted in a greatness of language, expression and ideas which places him in the front rank of world poets.

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25. סדן דב, "איחור", דבר, 20.11.55, עמ' 3.
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LIST OF CORRESPONDENCE

- 1) Dina Katzabian.
- 2) Stuart Cohen, Department of Political Studies, Bar Ilan.
- 3) Mrs Libbia Kahane Ref. Service, Jewish National and University Library (2).
- 4) Mrs Gene Baharav. Wrote and procured the tape for me from Jerusalem.
- 5) David Wu (Chinese Consul, C.T.).
- 6) Shin Shalom. (more than one).
- 7) Prof D.C. Lau. Chinese University, Hong Kong (2).
- 8) University Zurich - Mr or Ms Glanser.
- 9) A letter from Jagger Library to say Uriel Gilla, "Pninim Mishirat Ha-olam" is not available at any library in S.A.
- 10) Frankfurt-on-Maine University.
- 11) Cons. of Japan, C.T.
- 12) Rambhai in E. London.
- 13) University of Port Elizabeth (A. Schmidt).
- 14) T. Carmi.
- 15) Masada Press (A. Peli).
- 16) Central Library (Zurich).
- 17) S.A. Library, C.T.
- 18) Dept. of German, U.C.T. (John Noyes).
- 19) World Zionist Organisation (Hebrew Language Div. Israel - Shoshanna Eytan).
- 20) Simie Weinstein - Zionist Fed. Israel.
- 21) Hannah Weinstein - Zionist Fed. Israel.

- 22) University of Haifa (Prof. Friedlander).
- 23) Mrs Herz, ABY's sister, Basle, Switzerland.¹
- 24) Nathan Zach.
- 25) J.C. Cooper, United Kingdom (a number of letters).
- 26) Chana Mitler Kol Yisrel.
- 27) Ada Zemach, Jerusalem.
- 28) Jacob Intrator (ABY's nephew) (Washington and Israel).
- 29) Anita Glazer, ABY's niece (Haifa).
- 30) Israel Ben-Yosef, Switzerland.
- 31) Prof. Hakak, University of California, Los Angeles.
- 32) Kenny Barris.
- 33) University Gottingen (Mr or Ms Grobe).
- 34) University Frankfurt-on-Maine.
- 35) University Worzburg.
- 36) Unisa (University of S.A.). Prof. J.S. Kruger.
- 37) University of Tel-Avi (Avner Holtzman).
- 38) Inst. for Transl. of Hebrew literature (Isaac Goldberg).
- 39) University of London (Dept. of Political Studies).
- 40) University of Jerusalem (a Hebrew Philosophical Quarterly).
- 41) Beth Hatfutzoth - Research Dept. - Israel.

1. ABY was the eldest of ten children. His father died when he was very young. His mother remarried and had nine more children. Mrs Herz is ABY's youngest and only surviving half sister. Three families (of this family) remained in Przemyśl and perished in the holocaust. (This information was furnished by Jacob & Rachel Intrator, ABY's nephew and niece by marriage, Washington and Israel.)

- 42) Hebrew Union College - Jewish Inst. of Religion,
Cincinnati, Ohio.
- 43) University of Haifa.
- 44) University of Stellenbosch, German Dept. Dr Blumer.

Letters Returned Unopened

- 1) Barbara Hannah, Carl Jung's Secretary and biographer -
deceased a few years ago.
- 2) Dr Elias Canetti, Geneva, Switzerland. There is an
Elias Canetti in London phone book, but there was no
reply. Friends tried in London and Switzerland to no
avail.)
- 3) Olga Levinson : author of Adolph Jentsch (Taoist
artist in Namibia) - deceased.

A P P E N D I X

A SHORT RESUME OF TAO, AS GIVEN BY LIN YUTANG

"Tao is the mother of all things; it cannot be named or predicated; it manifests itself in form and disappears again in formlessness; it does not act; it does not talk; it is the fathomless and inexhaustible source of all life; it is strictly impersonal. In addition, it is impartial; it is imminent, and it operates in cycles by the principle of reversion, which causes the levelling of all opposites, making alike success and failure, strength and weakness, life and death, etc. From this spring all of Laotse's paradoxes."

In this summary, Lin Yutang does not say that Tao is frequently referred to as "the Way", which it is.

ABY himself mentions "the Way", when illustrating the Chinese language to Leah.

EXPLANATION OF YIN-YANG¹

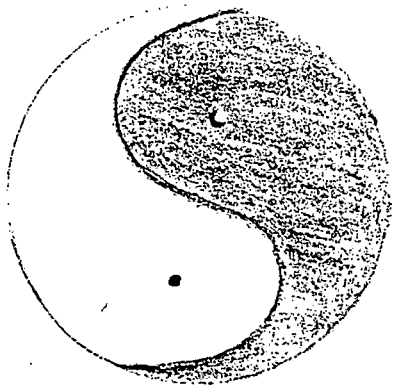
Yin-Yang are the well-known kindred connections of Chinese thought about nature (opposites that strengthen each other).

Yin stands for 'a constellation of such qualities as shade ("on the north side of a hill"), darkness, cold, negativeness, weakness, "femaleness", passive, regal, the mystic female, valley, void, abyss, passive but creative.

While Yang ("on the south side of a hill") denotes light, heat, strength, positiveness, wholeness, etc.

These opposites are the "two sides of a coin" - they need and re-affirm each other. The interaction of these opposites is the explanation of all changes in the universe.

Yin and Yang are thus the major principles of the universe,



YIN YANG

Everything contains
within itself the germ
of its opposite.

1. Cooper, J.C. Taoism : The Way of the Mystic (loc. cit.), Chapter 3, p. 26-40.

the regulators of the four seasons and the cycles of nature. The Yin-Yang symbolizes all paired existence, the complementary poles of nature. There is a perpetual and reciprocal action and reaction. They are in perpetual alternation in "universal reversibility".¹

The cyclic nature of the world is the fundamental basis of Tao. The words Yin and Yang occur only once in the Tao Te Ching, in Poem 42, where they appear by their translation as "shade" and "sun", respectively.

The Yin Mystic Female (or Void, or Valley) is passive and soft, but creative and powerful. "The Way", the teaching of Laotse and Chuang Tzu is described as mother.² (The Way could be another name for G-d.)³

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1. Grousset Rene, "The Rise and Splendour of the Chinese Empire. Quoted by Cooper, J.C. Taoism : The Way of the Mystic, Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1972, p. 28.
 2. Blakney, R.B. The Way of Life : Lao Tzu. Mentor Book, New American Library, N.Y. 1983, (Poem 59) p. 25.
 3. Cooper, J.C. says "no". Taoism : The Way of the Mystic, Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1972, p. 12,14. Blakney, R.B. does include G-d in his explanation. Blakney, R.B. The Way of Life Lao Tzu, Mentor Book, New American Library, N.Y. 1955, p. 38.

FOUR EXPLANATORY TERMS

A brief explanation of four Tao terms, a "skeleton key" so that the reader can know exactly what these terms refer to, as they occur:

1. Tao is an ancient Chinese philosophy, which is still very much a part of the Chinese culture today.
2. Tao Te Ching - one of the many books on Tao, which has appeared in many translations.
3. Laotse, the author to whom "Tao Te Ching" is attributed.
4. Chuang Tzu - another ancient Taoist author.
5. Yin and Yang - interchanging opposites, e.g. male and female, light and shade, the one complementing the other and forming the whole. The entire make-up of the universe is structured on Yin and Yang.

EMERSON AND ABY - PERHAPS SOMETHING IN COMMON

Emerson, 1803-1882, ranks as a leading figure in the thought and literature of American civilization.¹

Emerson's two essays, 'Circles' and 'Over-soul' are completely Taoist, and one appreciates them better after reading Laotse.²

"Emerson read extensively and when he quoted or took an idea from other writers, it was as an illustration of a truth that had already blossomed in his own heart and mind.³ Similarly Rilke & Jung say that they were introduced to ideas of other writers, that had been ideas in their own hearts and minds for a long time. Similarly with ABY, when he was introduced to the ideas of Tao, they had most likely been ideas in his own heart for a long time. When intervals of darkness came to Emerson, he found rays of light in the eastern teaching. Perhaps this was so with ABY.

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1. He was an essayist, critic, poet, orator and popular philosopher. He brought together elements from the past and shaped them into literature that had an important effect on later American writing.
 2. Yutang Lin. The Wisdom of Lao. Michael Joseph, London, 1958 p. 28.
 3. "Vedanta for Modern Man." Edited by Christopher Isherwood, Allen & Unwin, London 1952. Emerson and the East by Guido Ferrando, p. 320.

The light of the east came to him through his love for the infinite, the absolute. He considered that the universe is Nature and the Soul - "it is impossible to think and to speak without embracing both".¹

Emerson said there was one soul in everything, the "oversoul", the universal soul of which everything living is a part, within man is the soul of the whole.

"We have to learn to see nature, not only through our eyes, but through our hearts, so as to feel in harmony with it, and to realise that we are a part of it."² But this requires solitude, and reflection, that means, we cannot read, or write or allow fleeting thoughts and remembrances to pass through our mind.²

1. Vedanta for Modern Man, p. 321.

2. "Vedanta for Modern Man." Edited by Cristopher Isherwood, Allen & Unwin, London, 1952. Emerson and the East, by Guido Ferrando, p. 323.